

THE MAN FROM
CURDIE'S RIVER
OR WHERE MEN ARE MADE

DONALD MACLEAN



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THE MAN FROM CURDIE'S RIVER

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OR WHERE MEN ARE MADE

BY

DONALD MACLEAN

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MR. GEORGE EVANS
OF HEIDELBERG VICTORIA
PERSUADED ME TO BEGIN THIS WRITING
MISS NELLIE STONE
OF MURRUMHEENA VICTORIA
GAVE ME NO PEACE UNTIL IT WAS FINISHED
SO TO THESE TWO AND ANOTHER
BUT FOR WHOM IT HAD NEVER SEEN THE LIGHT
THE STORY IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

PREFACE

ANOTHER *Man from* —— ! Are authors bankrupt for titles ?

In the end of 1896, when M'Candlish left the Heytesbury Forest, Mr. Banjo Paterson's book—*The Man from Snowy River*, the first of the *Man from* series—was upon every lip and tongue in Australia.

M'Candlish stayed a few days in Camperdown with some friends. Naturally he had a good deal to say about his late district, CURDIE'S RIVER, and it was not long before his genial host, parodying Mr. Paterson's book, dubbed M'Candlish *The Man from Curdie's River*—hence the name.

CUIDRACH,

MURRUMHEENA,

MELBOURNE.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
CURDIE'S RIVER	I

CHAPTER II

EXPLAINS THE SITUATION	6
----------------------------------	---

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF THE MAN	9
---------------------------------	---

CHAPTER IV

HOW DONALD M'GINNIS BROKE THE COLT	16
--	----

CHAPTER V

THE NEW PARSON	26
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI

	PAGE
THE OXEN CONDUCTOR	34

CHAPTER VII

TERRIBLE BILLY	41
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII

DICK THE DASHER MEETS HIS MATCH	53
---	----

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST SUNDAY AT BRUCKNELL	63
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER X

"THE YOUNGER WOMEN"	71
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XI

WHILE THE LOGS WERE BURNING	81
-------------------------------------	----

CONTENTS

xi

CHAPTER XII

	PAGE
IN A FAR COUNTRY	88

CHAPTER XIII

THE WANDERER'S RETURN	92
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIV

THE TIMBOON BAND OF HOPE	101
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XV

A BUSH CONCERT	108
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE WAY HOME	117
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII

THE DANCE AND FIGHT AT TIMBOON	122
--	-----

CHAPTER XVIII

	PAGE
HARRY PEDEN'S ACCOUNT OF THE FIGHT . . .	130

CHAPTER XIX

DICK THE DASHER SEEKS A PICKER-UP . . .	135
---	-----

CHAPTER XX

HOW THE PARSON SETTLED THE FIGHT . . .	139
--	-----

CHAPTER XXI

A RELIGIOUS CONUNDRUM . . .	147
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXII

EXTREMES OF LEARNING . . .	154
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII

"THUNK" . . .	160
---------------	-----

CONTENTS

xiii

CHAPTER XXIV

	PAGE
GOD'S WOMAN	166

CHAPTER XXV

TOMMY	182
-----------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVI

AN EARLY MORNING RIDE, AND THE LOGIC OF THREE- PENNY-BITS	190
--	-----

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW THEY BROUGHT THE WEDDING CAKE HOME FROM TERANG	200
---	-----

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE OLD ORDER AND THE NEW	206
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PARSON EXPLAINS	216
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXX

	PAGE
"AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS" . . .	225

CHAPTER XXXI

"ALL IN A GARDEN FAIR" . . .	232
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BREAKDOWN AT TIMBOON . . .	239
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIII

DICK THE DASHER	247
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIV

"THE BOLT FROM THE BLUE" . . .	257
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXV

"FAREWELL TO CURDIE'S RIVER" . . .	268
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TURN OF THE TIDE	277
--------------------------------	-----

THE MAN FROM CURDIE'S RIVER



CHAPTER I

CURDIE'S RIVER

IF you climb to the top of Mount Leura from the Camperdown side, you will find yourself on a ridge, which extends for nearly half a mile. If you walk along that ridge until you reach the highest part, then face to your left, lift up your eyes and look to the north, east, and west, you will see what is not only the richest, but one of the prettiest bits of country in all Australia.

This is our "Lakes Country," and if the day be fine and clear you may count quite a number from where you stand—lakes of all shapes and sizes ; and wherever you see a lake, you will see a great guardian hill near by ; and the bigger the lake, the bigger the hill.

It seemed to me sometimes when lying

there on the ridge, and letting my fancy run loose, that long ago this was a huge plain, and that one day a mischievous giant marched across it with a shovel on his shoulder, and having nothing in particular to do, he here and there dug up a shovelful of earth and pitched it aside ; and by and by the hole became a lake and the shovelled earth a mountain.

Standing here on Leura's highest point, and facing north, to the right a wide stretch of rich grazing land rolls away eastward, past many a lake and creek and comfortable homestead, until it is broken up and lost amongst the trees and hills. To your left and towards the sunset the pretty village of Camperdown, with its one wide street, thickly planted with fine elm-trees, nestles close up under the sheltering side of the hill. To the north from the long white road and big stone-quarry at your feet, your eyes travel across a lovely panorama of lakes and hills, paddocks, dairy farms, and stations, until they rest upon a range of mountains, hanging misty and blue on the horizon, like far-off clouds.

Having looked your fill on this scene, you will turn eagerly enough to find out what lies to the south ; and when you do you will see little else save the waving tops of innumerable

trees—for a boundless sea of foliage stretches itself out before you, its green waves rolling in from the depths of the Heytesbury Forest, and thinly breaking on the mountain's foot.

And if the grassy land to the north of Leura be the richest in Australia, this Heytesbury Forest country which adjoins it, and stretches south from the mountain to the sea, is, with the exception of patches here and there by the creeks and rivers, almost the poorest.

As you now stand facing south, it is just about thirty miles as the crow flies to the great ragged cliffs and conical sand-hills that guard the land from the never-ending assault of the southern seas. Far away in the east this forest loses its identity in the ranges and thicker forests of Cape Otway; while a day's march to the west the trees thin out and come to an end a few miles this side the fine town of Warrnambool.

A little distance from Mount Leura and away to your left lies a sheep-station named Colantet; on this station is a never-failing spring, from which a tiny stream of water trickles down the hillside, and turns to seek the sea as naturally as a new-born babe seeks for its mother's breast. Soon other little streams join

this one, and together they form a modest creek ; ere long the creek becomes a highway, and a hundred other creeks, flashing and sparkling in the sunlight, dance noisily down from the hills and pour themselves into it.

Follow this water down through its myriad turnings and wanderings amid the wild bracken and deep fern gullies, and the creek becomes a river, Curdie's River, with bold, steep banks rising three hundred feet high, and crowned with lightwood- and messmate-trees that lift their heads another two hundred feet higher.

Now take a boat and row with the stream ; soon it deepens and widens, the banks slope back and are lost in the forest ; and in place of the tall lightwoods and messmates the river-side is thickly fringed with ti-tree that arches across the water from either side, and in places meeting overhead, and draped fantastically with wild clematis and other forest creepers, forms one of the most picturesque waterways in the wide, wide world.

On you go with the stream until you pass beneath Nirranda bridge, then the face of the country changes ; on your left the bush, scorched and blackened by fire, shuts out the view ; to the right the ti-tree has given place to a low, brown heath, through which in one place a hill

slopes down to the water's edge, like an animal stooping to drink. An hour's vigorous row from here brings you to where the river suddenly widens out into the broad, shallow lake known as Curdie's Inlet. Three miles on is the sea.

CHAPTER II

EXPLAINS THE SITUATION

EIGHTEEN years previous to the time of which I write, my father and I left the mining in Ballarat, and after much careful calculation and examination of soil, selected six hundred and forty acres on the western side of the river, about nine miles up from the bridge.

There we literally cut a farm out of the forest, and named it "Glenullen," after my father's old home in Skye. There, too, high on the hillside, near the head of a little valley, through which runs a tiny creek, we built with our own hands the weatherboard farmhouse with white limestone chimneys, which is standing there to-day.

Our family just now consisted of my widowed mother, my wife, our little four-year-old daughter, Olive, and myself. There

was also a young fellow named Richard Seaton, known colloquially as "Dick the Dasher." Dick was the man—and sometimes maid—of all work on the farm, and in addition to Dick, our home had been for years the boarding place of the missionaries who ministered to the people of the forest.

These missionaries, who are mostly young students, are only allowed to stay one year in a district, unless under very special circumstances. This is a good arrangement for a young man, because it not only gives him a chance to study, if he wishes to do so, but if he should happen to get into a rut—and such things have been known—he has the opportunity to profit by his experiences, and make a fresh start when he goes to his new place.

It was the time of the annual change of missionaries, and we were patiently awaiting the arrival of a successor to Mr. Silcock, who had just left us. Mr. Silcock had ridden Tommy, the mission pony, as far as Warrnambool, had left him there, and gone on by boat to his new charge. Mr. M'Candlish, who was succeeding him, was to come down to Warrnambool by train, get Tommy from the stable where he had been

left, and ride out here, and we were hourly expecting him to come.

Mr. Silcock had not been a success, and for a very simple reason: He was a good man in many ways and a fair preacher, but he was so abominably cruel to his horse that in the end people refused to come and hear him, saying that "no Christian would treat a dumb animal as he did," and a great many other things of a like nature; consequently congregations were small and the work in a low state, so we were earnestly praying that the man who was now coming might prove worthy of the high vocation to which God had called him, and find grace in the eyes of the people. Whether or not our prayers were answered, you shall presently see.

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF THE MAN

IT was the 21st of April, 1896. The westering sun had pushed the shadows of the big gum-trees far down the valley, for it was nearly four o'clock. The day was calm and still and the forest seemed asleep. The only movement to be observed anywhere was overhead, where a great fleet of milky white clouds with pink stained summits were sailing slowly and majestically over the blue ocean of sky, and the only sound to be heard was the ripping, ringing swish of a scythe, where Dick the Dasher was cutting ferns on the hillside. I was busy in the orchard, and wondering in a vague sort of way what manner of man our new parson would prove to be, when suddenly the gate on the hilltop near the orchard, which opens out into the forest proper, creaked loudly in its wooden sockets, and I looked up just

in time to see it swing widely open, and a young man, mounted on Tommy, come riding through.

The new parson had arrived.

We colonials are not much given to gush, so I did not hurry out to meet him as I might have done, but stood awhile where I was, hidden by the apple-trees, and watched him as he wheeled Tommy round and edged him back to the gate, which he pushed to with a clatter and then rode leisurely down the hill, the reins hanging loosely in his hand.

At the first creak of the gate Dick the Dasher's scythe had ceased to swish, and when I looked across the valley he was leaning on the handle of it, watching the new-comer with all his eyes.

Glancing over at the house I caught the flutter of a dress through the door, and knew that my wife had slipped in from the kitchen—which is at one end of the back verandah—to tell the news to my mother, who would be sitting by the fire in the dining-room, and I guessed that already two pairs of kindly, inquisitive eyes were peering through those innocent-looking curtains and taking the minister's measure.

But the cause of this mild excitement seemed

quite unconscious of the stir he was making. Whether he saw us or not I cannot say ; it would appear that he did not, for it was his custom when first he came amongst us to shout out "Good-day" to everybody he saw, far or near. On the other hand, the average Australian, sleepy-looking and inert as he almost invariably is, will often see a great deal more than people suppose, and it's quite possible that the new parson did see the whole play, and had a good laugh to himself at our expense. However, he gave no sign, but rode slowly down the hill, his slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, and his body swaying from side to side with the motion of the horse. At the foot of the hill he jumped Tommy over the creek, then went up the other side and through the slip-rails that lead out into the house paddock, and so towards the gate of the backyard, where my wife was now waiting to welcome him.

"Is this where the Watsons live?" he shouted when he was yet a great way off.

"Yes," the wife shrilled back, "and you are Mr. M'Candlish."

"Yes, my name's M'Candlish ; but how did you know?"

"I knew you by the horse," the wife answered, laughing.

"Is the horse well-known, then?"

"Well-known! There isn't a soul in the forest, old or young, that doesn't know Tommy, and wherever you go in the next two months, people will say, 'There goes the new parson.' "

"Well," he said, "if that's the case, it will save me the bother of introducing myself."

By this time he was at the gate, where he dismounted; and his method of doing so sent a chill through my blood, for instead of keeping his left foot in the stirrup and lowering himself to the ground, as any sober-minded man would have done, he simply threw his right leg over the pommel of the saddle and slid down lady fashion. This was innocent enough in itself, but I was afraid it indicated a spirit of lightness, and lightness in a minister I abominate above all things. Our last man was bad tempered, and that was a sore, God knows; but if this one should prove light and frivolous it would be a pestilence. However, I determined to be patient and judge nothing before the time.

Having alighted, the parson shook hands cordially with the wife, and asked what he should do with the horse.

"Oh, you'll just take the saddle and bridle off him and let him go."

This he did, and stood awhile watching Tommy as he made his way down the hill looking for a place to roll. Then under my wife's directions he hung his saddle and bridle on a peg in the verandah, and when this was done both disappeared through the door into the dining-room.

It was getting near milking-time now, and Dick the Dasher, after glancing at the sun and putting away his scythe, came swinging down the hill, with his old harvester's hat pushed far back on his stiff red hair. Going to the kennel he loosened Glen, his bluey-grey, wall-eyed cattle-dog, preparatory to bringing home the cows. On his way to the river paddock where the cows were he came across to the orchard fence, and shouted out in that great voice of his—

“Seen the new parson?”

“Yes.”

“What j'think of him?”

I was too Scotch to give an opinion so quickly, so I said—

“I've not had time to judge, but you are pretty smart at sizing up people, what do you think of him?”

“Not much.”

“Not much—how's that?”

“ Too much like a jockey ; didn’t yer notice the rig out ’e ’ad on Tommy ? ”

To tell the truth I had noticed it and was no more favourably impressed with it than Dick himself; but I did not say so.

It was customary for us at that time to provide a horse for the missionary, but we expected him to provide a saddle and bridle for himself. Mr. M’Candlish had brought his with him, and it was their unusual and startling appearance that had roused the spirit of criticism in Dick the Dasher.

The trappings of the average missionary are, as a rule, so worn and patched and old as scarce to be worth the picking up. But every particle of Mr. M’Candlish’s was brand new. The saddle was light and neat, with fawn-coloured lining ; the saddle-cloth was blue. The stirrup-irons were of solid nickel, massive and square to the foot. The girth was leather, and had a serviceable look, but a white circling with a red stripe in the centre ran over all, and gave it a singularly flash and rakish appearance. A handsome breastplate and martingale spanned Tommy’s ample shoulders, while a crupper was provided for his tail. The bridle was a light double reined one with bright nickel bit, one of the new racing kind, no bars,

but huge rings. To crown all, the forehead band was made of patent leather in colour a brilliant blue.

I had never before seen a horse so gorgeously arrayed, not even at the Camperdown Show. The whole make up was so unusual and for a minister so utterly out of place that in a manner of speaking it took my breath away, and I was not surprised to hear Dick's criticism. Still, I had no intention of discussing the parson with Dick, who was not a Christian, so I merely said—

“It's a bad plan, Dick, to judge a book by its cover only,” and went off to the stables, while Dick the Dasher, left to himself, whistled up his dog and went away to the river paddock for the cows.

CHAPTER IV

HOW DONALD M'GINNIS BROKE THE COLT

WHEN Dick the Dasher came to the brow of the hill overlooking the flat and the river he saw a figure on horseback, waiting close to the water's edge, on the far side. This was no more than he expected, for the greater part of the country immediately beyond the river belonged to a family named Black. Alex Black, the youngest son, was about the same age as Dick, the two were great cronies, and made a point of meeting at the river every day when they went for the cows.

Dick had no sooner appeared on the hilltop than he was greeted with a long-drawn-out "Coo-ee!" and putting his hands to his mouth to concentrate the sound he returned it with interest, then made his way down the hill with enormous strides; but long before he

had reached the foot they began their conversation, flinging their remarks like stones across the river.

"'Ow er yer gittin' on, Alex?"

"Right-o, Dick. 'Ow er you?"

"Somethink lovely."

"Well, you look it anyway. You oughter git a sun bonnet ter purtect your complexion."

Dick's weather-beaten countenance broke into a good-humoured smile.

"I went over ter the store ter git one yesterday," he replied, "but they'd run out ov um, said they'd sold the last one ter you, but leavin' the subject, as the man said, an' comin' back ter the point, wots the news, anythink fresh?"

"No, not much anyway, but I 'ad a bit er fun this mornin'."

"Oh, 'ow was that?"

"Well, you know Thomas's old place out on the grass-tree plain?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wos out there to-day lookin' for cattle. You know the Thomas's sold out a while back to a family named M'Ginnis, not long out from Scotland. Well, about dinner-time I 'appened ter be near there, so I thought I'd pay 'em a friendly call, see wot they wos like, an' perhaps git some dinner at the same time.

"There's a scandalous croud ov a fam'ly, I might tell yer, six boys an' four girls, besides the father an' mother, an' w'en I got there I found the whole bloomin' lot ov 'em down at the stockyard.

"It appears they'd bought that brown colt ov Sampson Smith's, an' they were goin' ter break 'im in, an' they were right in the thick ov it w'en I come up. 'Ow they'd got the tacklin' on 'im I don't know, but they managed it after a fashion; an' just as I come up, Donald, the oldest son, a big, long-legged feller about twenty-seven years old, was goin' to mount 'im. I could see right away that 'e'd scarcely ever been on a 'orse's back before, so I sez ter meself, 'Ere's fun,' and sure enough there was fun.

"Two or three ov the boys—big, powerful fellers they are, too—were hangin' on ter the colt's 'ed fer all they were worth, an' presently Donald climbs inter the saddle. You should a'seen 'im, 'e looked as graceful as a farmer's wife climbin' inter a spring-cart over the wheel; an' I 'ad ter chaw the end ov me necktie ter keep from larfin', 'owever, after a lot ov fixin' an' fussin' round, 'e got 'ees feet inter the stirrup-irons; then 'e grabs 'old ov the reins with both 'ees 'ands an' sings out—

“ ‘ I’m all richt now.’ ”

“ I thought to myself, ‘ You’ll be alright if you don’t ’appen ter fall on yer ’ed.’ ’Owever, I didn’t say anythink, an’ the others let go an’ cleared out. I expected ter see somethink ’appen then, an’ got me necktie outer me mouth fer fear I’d be choked, but no, the colt walked round the place as quiet as a sheep, an’ Donald seemed ter think ’e ’ad ’im bluffed, an’ began ter git a bit cocky. ‘ These colonial puck-jumpers,’ ’e sez, ‘ are chjust like ta plough-horses at home : all you will need iss to pe fery firrum, an’ then you can do chjust ass you please wis t’em. I nefer pelieved,’ ’e sez, ‘ what we used to read apout t’em in ta pooks, an’ this chjust proves I was richt.’ An’ with that ’e give the colt an unmerciful chop round the ribs with a bullick-hide ridin’-whip ’e wos carryin’, and then the fun began.

“ The colt nearly jumped out of ’ees skin, an’ Donald lost both ’ees stirrups first act. Then the stirrup-irons began ter swing about, an’ the colt got more scared than ever, an’ did a little frightened bolt round the yard ; then ’e stopped sudden an’ give two or three introductory props. By this time Donald wos pretty well out on the colt’s neck, an’ ’ees britches ’ad worked about ’arf way up ’ees great ’airy

legs, an' 'e looked a picture. The brothers an' sisters couldn't help laughin' at 'im, but 'ees mother seemed terribly upset about it, an' began cryin' out in a pleadin' sort ov way—

“‘Tonal', Tonal', pull your trewses down !’
But Tonal's troubles about 'ees trousers ; 'e 'ad others things ter think of.

“W'en the colt began ter jump about Donald dropped the reins an' got 'im round the neck, an' of course that made the colt fifty times worse. 'E backed away like a goat fer about ten yards ; then 'e got 'ees 'ed down, an' you should a-seen 'im go ter market !

“W'en 'e started ter buck the old man an' all the young uns began dancin' round the yard, singin' out like mad—

“‘Sthuck till her, Tonal' ! sthuck till her, Tonal' ! sthuck till her ! sthuck till her !’ An' Tonal' did ‘sthuck till her,’ until the third buck ; then 'e shot up in the air an' turned clean 'ed over turkey, an' landed flop on 'ees sit-me-down right in front of the old lady. It wos that sudden that they were still singin' out, ‘Sthuck till her, Tonal' !’ w'en Tonal' lit on the ground ; an' I thought I'd 'ave took a fit w'en 'e looks at 'em as savage as a native cat an yells—

“‘How ta teffel can I sthuck till her when I'm no in ta saadle ? ’ ’ ”

Dick the Dasher enjoyed this immensely.

"It must a-been as good as a circus," he said. "I'd a-liked ter been there meself. But wot 'appened after that?"

"Oh, I went over then an' offered to give 'em a hand. They wouldn't 'ear ov me gittin' on the colt at first. Donald said, 'She is ā teffel!' An' 'e couldn't see 'ow I wos goin' ter manage 'her' if 'e couldn't. 'Owever, I talked 'im over at last, took 'ees saddle off, put me own on, an' mounted. 'E give me a pretty 'ard go fer it, but I beat 'im at last."

"Not much fear about that, Alex," said Dick, for it was a proverb in the forest that Alex could ride "anything with hair on."

"Well, I dunno," said Alex modestly. "But ennyhow, they took me inside afterwards an' gimme some dinner. Darned good dinner it was too! An' now I'm one ov the fam'ly."

"Nice fam'ly?"

"One of the nicest ever I snapped."

"Wot are the girls like?"

"Reg'lar peaches!"

"Straight wire?"

"You bet."

"Well, I'll tell you wot it is, Alex, we'll 'ave ter lose a cow or two shortly, an' one er these Sundays we'll go over that way lookin' fer 'em."

"Right you are, Dick," said Alex, with a grin of intelligence ; and then : "Anythink startlin' 'appened over your way to-day?"

"Nuthin' much, 'cept the new parson."

"Go on ! 'As he come?"

"Yas, 'ee's come ; an' as Uncle Remus said, 'ee's come 'a-zoonin.'"

"Go on ! W'en did 'e make 'ees formal entry?"

"'Bout four the safternoon."

"Wot's 'e like?"

"I'm hanged if I know wot 'ee's like exactly, I 'aven't spoke to 'im yet ; but 'e seems a pretty hard snap. You should 'ave 'eard 'im bellerin' out at the missus ; 'e wos singin' out all the way up from the slip-rails."

"Go on ! 'E must be a tough un."

"'E is a tough un right enough. But the rummiest thing about 'im is the rig-out 'ee's got on old Tommy ; you never see anythink like it. W'en Johnny Watson saw 'im first 'e wos that paralysed that 'e couldn't move outer the orchard ter meet 'im. I wos cuttin' ferns on the side ov the hill, an' w'en the parson wos comin' through the gate out ov the forest, I looked across an' the sun flashed on 'ees stirrup-irons, an' I thought I wos struck with lightnin'. I wos fair dazzled, an' as fer old Tommy, wot

with a breastplate bracin' 'im in in front an' a crupper bracin' 'im in behind, 'e could 'ardly walk; an' wot with all the silver an' colour round 'im 'e looked about as 'appy as old Stringy-bark Paterson does w'en 'ee's got on a white shirt and 'ees Sunday clothes. Look 'ere, Alex, if this new boundary-rider of ours don't make a sensation w'en 'e goes ridin' inter Timboon I'll eat me bloomin' 'at, you take my word."

Alex was deeply interested.

"'E must be a dazzler," he said. "But wot's 'e like? Is 'e young or old, long or short, fat or thin, w'iskers or wot? The girls will be dyin' ter know all about 'im w'en I git 'ome."

"I'm blowed if I know wot ter say about 'ees age," Dick replied; "I wos too far away ter see properly. But 'e ain't old; in fact 'e looked about eighteen, but I suppose 'ee's more than that. 'E ain't wot you would call fat; 'ee's a bit the other way—rather thin. I think myself," Dick added weightily, "I think 'ee's a converted jockey, an' 'e ain't been long converted neither. Rum thing," he went on reflectively, "fer the committee ter send a jockey out preachin'."

"Yes," Alex replied wisely, "but there's

rummier things than that. I knew a man once——”

But Alex's story was never told, for just then a shrill, impatient “Coo-ee!” came rolling down the valley.

“My gosh!” he said, gathering up the reins, “I'll 'ave ter do a git; the girls are waitin' at the cowyard. Where's that bloomin' heifer gone?” he demanded, looking round at the mob of cows lazily standing about. “I'm blowed if she ain't gone back ter the scrub. Consarn 'er!” he added, in injured tones, “I rounded 'em all up just before you come down, an' now it'll take me till dark ter cut 'er out again. So long, Dick.” And digging his spurs into his horse's ribs and whirling his stock-whip round his head, Alex raced away to the scrub after the obstreperous heifer.

In the dusk of the evening Alex told the girls and the others who were at the cowyard that the new parson had arrived, that he was eighteen years old, and a converted jockey. After tea Charlie Black, who was courting the eldest Miss Stirling, rode over to see her. It happened that quite a number of people were collected at Stirlings' that night, and to these Charlie gave Dick's account of the new parson. Consequently, before M'Candlish was twenty-

four hours in our midst, it was known throughout the forest that he was a converted jockey and only eighteen years of age.

Thus oaks from acorns spring, and, as a natural consequence, the interest in the new parson increased twentyfold, and his appearance was everywhere eagerly awaited.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW PARSON

IT was almost dark before our milking finished, the last cow turned out, and the milk put away, Dick and I hurried up to the house, for not only were we anxious to see the new parson, but there was a sharp, frosty nip in the air that made us glad to get in to the warmth of the fire.

Inside the dining-room a great log was blazing on the wide whitewashed hearth, flooding the room with a cheerful brightness ; and as we drew near our hearts were cheered by the rosy glow that streamed out through the windows and the open door. Our first business when we had reached the house was to wash and tidy ourselves up a bit, and when this was done we came in to tea.

My mother was sitting in the chimney-corner in her big rocking-chair, with her feet half buried in the rich warm wool of the fleece

of a sheep, which lay before the fire like a mass of sunlit snow, and did duty as a hearth-rug. I paused on the threshold of the door to take in the scene, and could not help feeling proud and happy as I did so.

Very sweet and beautiful did my mother seem to me as she sat there in the firelight with her hands folded contentedly in her lap. The peace of God seemed to rest upon her face, all the furrows ploughed so deeply by time and care were smoothed and softened down by that rich, kindly glow, while the grey hair, escaping from the toils of her quaint woollen cap, was transformed into a halo of glory about her head. She had worked long and hard in her day, and now that it was towards evening with her, and the work of her day was done, I had no greater joy than to see her in peace and comfort, and at rest from her labours.

Sitting at her feet and looking up into her face was our little Olive. The two had been talking seriously together, as the very old and the very young oftentimes will do. Olive invariably came to her grandmother when the evening drew on, for the red coals, the dancing firelight, the climbing smoke, and the leaping shadows never failed to fill her head with strange fancies, and she loved to talk to her

grandmother about them. The thoughts of Olive at these times were long, long thoughts, and some of her questions would have puzzled Mr. Gladstone.

The tea was ready and laid out nicely on a snow-white tablecloth ; the china cups and saucers, the knives, forks, and spoons gleamed and flashed fitfully as the flame of the fire waxed and waned ; and in the centre of the table stood a white Bismarck lamp, all ready to be lit. Anything more attractive to cold, hungry mortals it would be impossible to imagine, and I heartily agreed with Dick the Dasher when he exclaimed : " My word ! this looks all right."

It was always a great joy to me, after a hard day's work in the paddocks, to come home at night sure of a welcome such as this ; and a thousand times over have I thanked God for giving me a wife who knew how to make the most of our simple belongings, so that our home, though never luxurious, was always cheerful and bright, for I'm perfectly certain of this, that in the final reckoning cheerfulness does more to make a man's home attractive to him than anything else on earth.

Olive leapt up from the hearthrug and ran to meet me as I entered, crying out that the

new minister was come. I took her up in my arms and sat down by the fire, where she proceeded to rearrange my hair and whiskers, telling me as she did so about Mr. M'Candlish's pretty saddle and bridle. M'Candlish's boxes had come a day or so previously, and he was busy in his room unpacking them, when the wife came in to light the lamp and pour out the tea, so Olive was sent to tell him to come to tea, and a minute later he came, with Olive high on his shoulder and a friendly smile on his face.

He was a typical colonial of the country type, and one glance was sufficient to dispel Dick's idea that he had ever been a jockey, for he was very tall, active looking, and muscular; and although there was not a pound of surplus flesh on his body, yet he weighed full thirteen stone, as I discovered later on. He was lean and lank and brown as Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," but, unlike that illustrious seaman, so far from being ancient was he, that at first sight I set him down at twenty-two, but being clean-shaven, he looked somewhat younger than he really was.

For the rest he was neither dark nor fair, handsome nor ugly, neither did he look clever nor a dunce. There was nothing in his whole

make-up to indicate anything exceptional either one way or the other. Even his clothes were in keeping with his general appearance, for he was dressed in a suit of dingy grey, cut after the manner of men—not the slightest attempt at clericalism. But for his physique he would have passed anywhere for a grocer's assistant, or a bank clerk of unassuming tastes. Added to this, he had that tired, languid, "can't-be-bothered" appearance so common to those who have been born and bred in hot climates, and particularly in Australia.

Taking him altogether, he was just as ordinary looking and commonplace as it was possible for a man to be—certainly the most unpretentious missionary we had ever had in the forest; and I summed him up at once as one of the great army of preaching hacks, one-talent men, honest, drudging, nothing more; and I must frankly confess that I was disappointed. I had been hoping great things from this man, but it only needed one brief glance to convince me that my hopes were vain. He might be an Isaac, digging the wells that others had digged, but that he could ever dig a new well, or take the initiative in anything, or that he would pull things together in the forest, I could not believe.

Had I taken to myself the advice I had recently given to Dick about judging books by their covers, I might have saved myself much unnecessary trouble of mind. But I have ever found, as did Portia, that "it is easier for me to teach twenty what were good to be done, than to be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching."

However, when we sat down to tea, and I had time to observe him more particularly, I fell to wondering what connection there could possibly be between this grave young man with soft, earnest voice, and the one who had come shouting up from the slip-rails ; also as to where the affinity came in between that sombre suit of grey and the gorgeous riding kit out on the verandah. How a man who could be the one could also be the other ; and again, how a man whose tastes would lead him to choose the one could also have a taste for the other, was more than I could tell ; and the more I thought it over, the more it puzzled me.

Also during tea, when the stiffness had worn off somewhat and we began to talk freely, I found his speech just as diverse as his tastes, and full of strange heights and depths. There was about him an odd, childlike kind of sim-

plicity and innocence, mixed up with an amount of deep, subtle wisdom that fairly staggered me. At times I thought him a perfect ignoramus and in general knowledge far behind myself, but I had no sooner complacently settled my mind on this point than he would drag me out into something so deep, that I was glad to scramble back again to the safe land of the commonplace, feeling as I did so that probably the new parson had forgotten more than I ever knew. So it fell out that by the time tea was over I was thoroughly puzzled. Colloquially speaking, I could make neither "head nor tail" of him, and consequently, greatly to my surprise, I found myself more interested in this ordinary looking missionary than I could remember ever to have been in any of his brilliant predecessors.

When tea was over and cleared away, we drew our chairs up to the fire, and Dick the Dasher, who had hitherto preserved an unusual silence, asked the parson how he had managed to find his way across the forest.

"I didn't find my way," he replied. "I simply sat on Tommy, and he did the finding. I slept at Nullawarre last night," he went on, "and Samson Smith brought me along as far as Becket's this morning. We had dinner there,

and afterwards they turned me out into the forest, and said, 'Let Tommy take you,' and I 'let' him. I hadn't the remotest idea where he was taking me, but I trusted him implicitly, and he brought me right here." Then looking round the parson added warmly, "He's a great horse is Tommy."

My heart warmed to the man there and then, for Tommy was a huge favourite with us all, and I was immensely pleased to find that his new master had sufficient knowledge of horses to be able to understand and appreciate him.

CHAPTER VI

THE OXEN CONDUCTOR

FOR a day or two after his arrival M'Candlish was busy getting things in order in his room and in making out a plan of his work. But Thursday was mail day, so he saddled Tommy and went across to the railway terminus for the mail ; for it was the recognised thing that the Mathiesons go Tuesday, the parson, whoever he might be, Thursday, and I on Saturday.

It was only a matter of three miles to the railway station, but that three were equal to a dozen on ordinary roads. There were quite a number of ways of getting there, but no matter which way you went there were twelve gates to open and shut, and every gate as difficult to work as a Chinese puzzle, and invariably situated in the middle of a deep and foul bog. Also there were numerous great hills to climb

up and slide down. There were logs innumerable for the horse to jump ; there were half a dozen creeks and a river to cross ; and the mud lay eighteen inches deep on all the tracks.

I went with the parson to the gate of the top paddock and gave him a general idea of the way, and then returned to do some fern-cutting, leaving him to his own devices and to Tommy.

M'Candlish crossed to the far side of the river without difficulty, and was threading his way through the scrub along the top of the hill, when there broke upon his ear a tempest of quaint oaths and curses, mingled with a torrent of high-sounding names—shouted out with extraordinary fluency and tremendous lung power, and accompanied by a fusilade of sharp reports like the rapid firing of pistols.

The parson pulled up to listen, then galloped forward full of expectation, but when he emerged from the scrub all he found was a solitary team of bullocks, silently straining at an empty wagon, down to its axles in the blue, gluey mud ; and the whole commotion produced by the driver, a long, gaunt, tired-looking figure, "full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard," who was delivering, or damning his soul, in the manner described.

As M'Candlish appeared upon the scene this

individual brought his whip round the flanks of a black bullock on the off side of his team, who had evidently been shirking his duty ; and he did it with such deadly precision and telling effect as to fairly double him up. Almost in the same instant he cracked the whip, with a report like a gunshot, an inch behind the ears of an old bull, who was taking a mean advantage of his yoke-fellow, a newly broken steer. With a stride forward he jabbed the whip-handle into the ribs of the third from the leaders on the near side ; and looking back at the same time, he discharged such a battery of sulphurous oaths at the two polers as must have scandalised those sedate animals. It certainly did the parson.

However, these gentle persuasions, oral and otherwise, had the immediate effect of causing the whole team to move forward like clock-work ; the back wheels of the wagon came through the glue with a "socgh," and gaining firmer ground rested, dripping ; and M'Candlish noted with surprise that the spaces between the spokes were so full of mud that the wheels appeared to be each of one solid piece.

Having got his team safely through the bog, the conductor of oxen paused for breath, lowered his whip, wiped the sweat from his

forehead with his coat-sleeve, and looked around him, and for the first time became aware of the presence of the parson.

One might have imagined some little surprise or confusion on the face of this son of the forest, caught in the very act, so to speak ; but there was none ; there never is where the real colonial is concerned. The merest glance at Tommy revealed to him the identity of the stranger, but he did not, as he would have said, "let on"—to have done so would have been to have given himself away. So preserving an air of completest innocence he drawled out—

"Day, boss."

The parson acknowledged this salutation by a slight nod of the head, and said "Good-day" in reply, at the same time pushing Tommy forward and holding out his hand ; for he had made up his mind that if he were going to succeed in this forest, he must be perfectly friendly with everybody right from the beginning.

The conductor of oxen grasped the hand in a huge, bony paw, black with mud, and hard as one of his bullock's horns, gave it a mighty shake that nearly brought the parson off his horse, and in his former drawling tones remarked—

“Fine da-ay.”

To this M'Candlish agreed, and then remarked that the roads were pretty bad.

“Wal—yas,” the oxen conductor replied, but with an air of reservation, as though he did not wish to concede too much. “Ya-as, they're pretty bad for this time a' year ; but,” he continued, bringing out his pipe and feeling in one pocket after another for matches, “it's a reg'lar bowlin'-green now compared to what it will be by and by, you take my word.”

The parson wore on his face just the slightest look of incredulity. It was a mistake to do so, and he repented at once ; but the oxen conductor, lighting his pipe with his head on one side, saw the look through the tobacco smoke, and at once proceeded to confirm his statement.

“Yas,” he went on, slowly and reflectively, when his pipe was fairly going, “Yas, it's this way, most er these bullickies ave selections, an' just now they're busy clearin' up their ground an' puttin' things right for the winter, but as soon as they're done they'll be through this forest like greased lightnin' after their bullicks ; then they'll begin haulin' logs to the mills, an' when the teams get goin' over these roads, wal, you'll see the genuwine artickle then, if you never did before, you take my word.”

Then with a scarcely perceptible glance at the parson out of the tail of his eye—

“J’know what I ’ad ter do last year at the end ov the winter?”

The parson had no idea.

“Wal, the roads got that bad that at last I ’ad ter buy about a ton ov cork an’ make it inter floats, then I fastened em on to the bullicks’ ’orns like life-buoys, an’ when the bullicks went outer sight in the mud I steered the corks.”

The conductor of oxen seemed somewhat spent with this effort, and by way of taking a rest he spat on his hands, and gripping his whip-handle, leant upon it with an air of exhaustion.

M’Candlish was too colonial to be at all surprised at this wonderful yarn, or to show it if he were; he smiled colonially, that is to say, slowly and sceptically, and said—

“I believe you.” Then as he rode by on the other side—

“You’re a hard citizen.”

There was nothing particularly complimentary in this somewhat ambiguous remark, but the conductor of oxen seemed to regard it as a lofty tribute to his character. He appeared greatly pleased, and nearly smiled. For-

tunately, however, he remembered not to, and drawing himself together with a sigh, said he supposed he must be "doin' a git."

M'Candlish was already "gitting," but when he reached the head of the team he turned in his saddle and shouted—

"I say."

"Wal?"

"I'm the new parson."

"Go on!"

"It's a fact, and I'm going to preach at Brucknell next Sunday. You'd better come over."

"Right, I'll be there—bring the missus and the fambly."

"Good! I'll be glad to see you."

"Yas," said the oxen conductor as he whirled the whip round his head, when the parson had gone on his way. "Yas, I'll be there, like water; an' the missus an' the fambly. Oh cripes!"

CHAPTER VII

TERRIBLE BILLY

THE railway line comes to an end at Timboon in a deep gully in the heart of the forest. The station consists of two little shanties on a platform on one side, and a miniature goods-shed on the other. The platform is high because of the unevenness of the ground, and at either end, where it projects beyond the buildings, there is a white railing, which saves you from falling off into the gully below.

To Timboon the coaches come from Princetown, Port Campbell, and Peterborough. You may see the coach-road going over the hills to your right when you are on your way from the train to the restaurant for lunch.

This railway station is the Acropolis of the forest, and to it all the philosophers come, as to Athens in Paul's day, to tell or hear some new thing. Three days a week in winter, and every

day in summer, with the exception of Sunday, all sorts and conditions of men sit on the white railings and stand about the platform, discussing all sorts and conditions of topics while they wait for the coming of the train.

On this particular Thursday Robert M'Candlish happened to be the last new thing, and this modern Mar's Hill was crowded with philosophers anxious to see and hear him without paying the penalty of going to church.

M'Candlish knew to a hair the class of men with whom he had to deal, and how much depended upon the first impression he made, so breathing a prayer to God for help, he tied Tommy up to a sapling in the scrub near by and descended upon the philosophers—a David going forth to cope with giants.

As M'Candlish approached, an elderly, white-whiskered orator in blue dungarees was addressing the gathering, and enforcing his points with the stem of his pipe. He finished his oration just as the parson reached the end of the platform, and the school turned to behold the last new thing.

Assuming an appearance of ease he was far from feeling, M'Candlish shouted out—

“Good-day, gentlemen,” and was in turn

greeted with a chorus of "good-days" from all present. Then he began to shake hands with everybody, and did it with such perfect sincerity that the philosophers took to him right away, for it proved that—as Long Jack Smith remarked to Bill M'Guire, who was M.C. at the dances—there was "None ov that dirty, stinkin' pride about him that yer see about most of these parsons."

When the hand-shaking was done, the examination of the "last new thing" began.

"Ow j'like the forest, Mr. M'Candlish?"

M'Candlish did like it and said so. They believed him, and were pleased. Then Stringybark Paterson—so called because his brown face was covered with a long growth of rough, tawny hair, that gave it the appearance of a sheet of stringy bark—Stringy took up his parable, and asked the question that local men ask of all newcomers.

"Wot j'think ov the roads?"

"Well, I think the roads beat anything I've seen so far, but I was told by a bullock-driver up in the forest that they are nothing now to what they will be later on." And the parson proceeded to relate what the conductor of oxen had told him while they talked by the way; whereat the philosophers marvelled greatly,

laughed moderately, and speculated much as to the identity of such a perverter of the truth.

Then spake a kind of Ulysses, a grisly ancient in moleskins, who openly boasted that he had not been inside a church for twenty years, and gained much distinction thereby.

"If you arsk me," he said, taking his pipe out of his mouth and spitting reflectively over the handrail, "if you were to arsk me, I guess I could tell yer without any trouble."

All eyes were turned Ulysses-wards interrogatively, like the search-lights of a fleet of warships upon a strange vessel approaching by night. In response to this concentrated inquiry, Ulysses answered sententiously—

"Terrible Billy," and turning away he spat again over the handrail.

With the single exception of the blacksmith, a dark-browed, thick-set man of pugilistic aspect, who in earlier days was said to have "followed the ring," in other words to have been a professional bruiser—who remarked that "these darned bullickies are such a hard-case lot that it's a hard job ter tell one from the other"—the "school" was disposed to agree with Ulysses, who thereupon ordered the driver of the Peterborough coach to tell Mr. M'Candlish about Terrible Billy and the Baptist parson.

The coach-driver—a young man of something the same height and equatorial diameter as the elder Mr. Weller would appear to have been—seemed rather doubtful as to the propriety of telling the story in present company, and began rather dubiously, but presently warming up to his work he spoke with great unction in the manner following :—

“Two years ago, w'en I was workin' at King's, a young Baptist parson just outer college come up there fer a hollerday. 'E was one er these fellers who'd never been outer town—been at school 'ard at it all 'ees life. 'E was a M.A. or somethin', I don't know what yer call it exackly, but 'e was terrible clever at books, though 'e could neither ride nor drive, nor do anythink else useful. Well, one day they sent me ter take 'im out fer a drive, an' soon after we started 'e got askin' me about bullicks, an' 'e told me 'e'd never seen a team ov bullicks in 'es life, an' 'e was mighty anxious ter see one before 'e got back ter town.

“Well, we was comin' back 'ome pretty late in the afternoon through Gubbins's Lane, w'en who should we see but Terrible Billy pullin' 'ees team up alongside the fence, just goin' ter unyoke, an' the parson was as pleased as a dog with a wooden leg ; I thought 'ees eyes would start out ov 'ees 'ed.

“Well, we pulled up an’ I interjooed the parson ter Billy, but the trouble wos I didn’t think ter tell Billy ’e wos a parson, an’ these Baptist parsons don’t wear a uniform like most er the others, they dress just like ordinary men.”

“Darned good job too,” remarked the Athenian in dungarees, interrupting. “If they are men, w’y the dooce don’t they dress like men? Look ’ere, young feller,” he continued, turning round on M’Candlish and eyeing him up and down, “you ’aven’t got inter a uniform yet, an’ if you take my advice you never will. Never you mind wot the girls tell yer; you listen to a sensible man.

“Wot I sez is this: if a parson’s a little jumped-up nothing, ’e needs a clerical suit ter pull him through—an’ there’s a lot er these tailor-made parsons about too; but if the parson’s a man—a man, mind you: M—A—N, man—an’ ’ees ’art’s in ’ees work, an’ ’ees ’onestly tryin’ ter do good, people don’t care a hang if ’ees dressed in moleskins.

“Seems ter me,” he continued, peremptorily waving down the coach-driver, who resented this interruption and was showing signs of impatience. “Seems ter me that these tailor-made parsons live in a unreal world. If one ov ’em gets inter a railway station, or a coach, or

train, or a crowd ennyw'ere, people see at once 'ees a parson, an' they put on their church manners, an' talk in subdood w'ispers, an' leave out all the swearin', an' they're that darned good, an' religious, an' unnatural, that the parson thinks they're all saints ; but if 'ee'd been dressed like a ordinary man 'ee'd 'ave seen 'em as they really are ; an' 'ee'd probably 'ave 'eard langwidge that would 'ave made 'ees 'air stand up.

"It ain't nice for a parson to 'ave ter listen ter swearin', I know, but I reckon if they're ever goin' ter save people they'll 'ave ter git ter know 'em ; an' they never will get ter know 'em so long as they go about dressed up in a hat like a fryin'-pan, a collar on back to the front, an' the orthodox devil-proof waistcoat, you take my word."

Having delivered himself thus, the Athenian in dungarees brought forth a huge red handkerchief with white spots, and raising his greasy hat wiped the sweat from his brow, and signed to the coach-driver that he might now continue his story, which thing the coach-driver also did.

"This parson didn't wear a uniform, enny'ow," he said, with something approaching a grin visible for one brief moment on his face, "an' 'e wos rewarded by hearin' an' seein' a man in

his natchural state, though I can't say that 'e seemed greatly taken with the man w'en 'e did. 'Owever, I'd scarcely interdooiced 'im ter Billy before 'e says—

“‘I have neveh seen a team of bullocks befoah.’

“‘Ain't you really?’ says Billy, lookin' at 'im as if 'e was some freak ov nature.

“‘No,’ says 'e, ‘I have not, and I'm just delighted to have the opportunity befoah I go home.’

“‘E wos that enthoosiastick about it that Billy was quite taken with 'im.

“‘I cannot imagine,’ says the parson, ‘how it is possible for one man to control so many animals.’

“‘Oh, it's easy enough,’ says Billy, ‘w'en you're used to it.’

“‘Is it really?’ says the parson; ‘it seems quite impossible.’ Then he says, ‘Would it be asking too much of you, Mr. Slack, to drive the animals along a few paces so that I might see for myself how it is done?’

“‘Anythink fer a quiet life,’ says Billy, lookin' quite pleased; an' with that 'e spit on 'ees 'ands, swung 'ees whip round 'ees 'ed, an' sung out at the bullicks. You know 'ees team—Brown, Berry, Oscar, Starpole, Nicholas, Dart, Cadger, Johnny, an' so on, 'ees voice risin' 'igher

an' 'igher all the time. But the bullicks thought it wos knock-off time an' didn't want ter shift ; the polers jibbed, the middle ov the team crumpled up inter a heap, an' the leaders some'ow got turned back lookin' at the wagin. It wos enough ter break the 'art of a wheel-barrer, specially w'en a man wanted ter show off a bit, an' I don't wonder that Billy got 'ees 'air off. W'en 'e got 'ees 'air off 'e began ter perform, an' wen 'e got properly goin'—well, I pitied them bullicks, an' I pitied that parson too.

“I've 'eard some langwidge in my time, 'aving been a rouse-about in a shearers' hut, an' I ain't easily shocked ; but I tell yer that day Billy surprised me. I'd no idea he'd such a flow of speech. Such cursin' an' swearin' an' shoutin' an' yellin' I never 'eard in my life before, an' I don't want to 'ear agen ; it wos terrible ; an' as for whip, you wouldn't believe any livin' man could be in so many places at once ; an' in five minutes 'e 'ad that team ov bullicks goin' down the road as peaceable as lambs an' as even as soldiers.

“After 'ed driven 'em along a bit just to show the parson wot 'e could do, 'e pulled 'em up, flung 'ees whip inter the wagin, an' come back lookin' quite pleased an' proud. 'E reminded me of a dog that's brought back a stick outer

the water, an' wants yer ter pat 'ees 'ed ; an' 'e seemed on for a yarn. But there wos no yarn left in the parson ; 'ees face wos as pale as death, an' 'e looked quite frightened. 'E thanked Billy in a trembly sort ov way, an' give me the nod ter drive on, an' off we went. 'E didn't say anythink for a long time, 'e seemed in a sort ov a dream, but at last 'e roused 'imself up a bit an' asked me where Mr. Slack lived. I told 'im as well as I could, an' next day 'e left for Melbourne.

"Well, about a week after that we wos all 'ere at the station, Billy included, an' I told 'im who the man in the trap was, thinkin' ter lay 'im out a bit. But Billy's troubles, 'e said 'e didn't care a hang if 'e wos fifty bloomin' parsons, because it wos a well-known fact that bullicks couldn't be drove without bein' swore at.

"That day there wos a packet in the mail for Billy, an' it wos such a unusual thing for Billy ter get anythink that we all crowded round 'im w'en 'e opened it, an' you should 'a seen the look on 'ees face w'en it turned out ter be a Bible from the parson."

"Well," said M'Candlish, when the coach-driver had finished, "Terrible Billy or no Terrible Billy, he has promised to come to church next Sunday and bring his wife and family."

“Wot!” The question burst simultaneously from the lips of a dozen philosophers, while the rest looked on open mouthed. “Wot!”

“He has promised to come to church next Sunday and bring his wife and family,” M’Candlish repeated slowly and deliberately.

“Billy?”

“Yes, Billy.”

The coach-driver bent himself double in a paroxysm of delight, and shouted, “Oh cripes! oh cripe-es!”

“Don’t you think he’ll keep his promise?” the parson demanded, looking round for an explanation, and finally fixing his eyes upon Ulysses.

“No, I don’t,” replied Ulysses decidedly; “no, I don’t.”

“Why not?”

“W’y not? Well, because ’e never was married and ’e ain’t got no fambly.” And Ulysses turned away once again and spat over the handrail.

Just then, fortunately for M’Candlish, a shrill whistle sounded from far down the line, and amid a general shout of “’Ere she comes!” the train rounded the curve and came up the track. The philosophers

scattered to take up posts of vantage on the platform, but not before M'Candlish had shouted—

“I'm going to preach at Brucknell next Sunday, and I'll be glad to see you all.”

There was a general chorus of—

“Right, we'll be there.” And a tall, thin, wooden-looking youth, with half-shut eyes, who was leaning against the water-tank, added slowly and gravely, “An' I'll bring *my* missus an' the fambly.”

The parson waited until the mail was sorted, and then having got his papers and letters, he set out for home, fully convinced that underneath his long, tired-looking exterior the average bushman hides a wealth of shrewdness and fun, equalling, if not surpassing, anything to be met with in the cities and towns. He also came to the conclusion that the man who is to preach to these bushmen the Word of Life needs just as much thinking and speaking power as though he were preaching in a city.

CHAPTER VIII

DICK THE DASHER MEETS HIS MATCH

FOR several years it had fallen to the lot of Dick the Dasher to guide the newly arrived parsons to the different preaching places in the forest. This was quite to the mind of master Dick, not that he cared particularly for the company of parsons, rather the contrary; but these journeys always meant a long ride through the forest, and Dick, like all Australian youths, had a passion for riding.

And there were other advantages too, for these trips not only enabled him to see a goodly number of people he did not often see, but they gave him the opportunity to compare the features of the girls at the places to which he went with those of the girls nearer home, and, to use his own expression, "do a line with them," if he found them to his liking, and I greatly fear that in those days Master Dick,

like the proverbial sailor, had a girl in every port ; or, to be more exact, in every church.

In addition to this, these rides gave Dick a splendid opportunity to display his stock of horsemanship and bushcraft before the new parson, which thing he was never slow to do, gaining great glory thereby. Also in the eyes of the various congregations to whom he introduced their new minister he loomed very largely indeed, riding up to the church as carelessly and indifferently as though new parsons were the commonest things under the sun. But apart from these very desirable considerations, there was yet another, and this one appealed to Dick the Dasher more than all.

For various reasons the Home Mission Committee found it necessary to change our men the last week in April. Now in the Heytesbury forest the dry weather almost invariably breaks up the last week in March ; then we have a month's solid rain, and at the end of that time all the tracks are simply a procession of bogs, and continue so until the end of September. So that the new parson, whoever he may be, has to do his first journeys over roads equal to the worst in the world, so far as mud is concerned. And it was the chief delight of Dick the Dasher to take out a new chum parson, ride

at a gallop through everything that lay in his way, and to keep just far enough ahead to give the parson the full benefit of all the mud flung back by his horse's feet.

Those were the supreme moments of the Dasher's life, when, having led the parson a delirious dance of seven miles or so, he landed him in the midst of the crowd about the church door, a breathless, woe-begone picture of misery—his clothes, cuffs, collar, hands, and face dripping with filthy water, and smothered with thick black mud.

Under the safe guidance and tender care of Dick the Dasher many a young parson who had set out from our place in the morning, eager to make a good impression on the people, and who to that end had arrayed himself, with much pardonable pride, in a brand new suit, and a collar high enough and white enough and stiff enough to fill all the beholders with wonder, has eventually ascended the pulpit and faced the people with his collar reduced to a dirty wet rag, his best suit utterly ruined, and his pride completely flattened out.

M'Candlish was planned to preach at Ecklin the first Sunday morning after his arrival in the forest, and was afoot early, rehearsing his sermon, grooming and feeding Tommy, and

making his preparations for the day. Dick the Dasher was also up betimes, and after he had milked the cows, he ran in his pony, which was a full sister to Tommy, younger and more flighty but much the same stamp.

The parson was first in the saddle, and Dick not being quite ready, bade him ride along the track, saying that he would "ketch up ter him." So M'Candlish rode on, and had got about half a mile along the way when he heard the thunder of hoofs behind him, and looking back was just in time to see the Dasher, bowed forward on the neck of his horse, burst round the curve in the track at a furious gallop.

When he drew nearer, M'Candlish saw that he was holding the reins with both hands, his arms were raised, and his elbows almost on a level with the top of his head, while a black mackintosh overcoat, unbuttoned, flew out behind him, and flapped madly in the wind. His left foot was out of the stirrup, and the iron banged the mare from the shoulder to the rump as she raced.

"I allus ride with one foot free," he yelled as he dashed by the parson, "case I get knocked off by the limb ov a tree : not so much danger ov gittin' hung in the stirrups if you've got one foot out."

"Not a bad idea if we're going to travel at that pace," M'Candlish replied, and loosening his feet, he sat down on Tommy and raced after Dick.

After a time the Dasher eased off somewhat, and the parson rode to within about two lengths of him, and was rapidly getting on even terms, when Dick shouted out—

"Don't you try ter git any nearer, boss. This mare never lets anythink pass 'er ; she'll keep ahead or bust, you take my word."

Presently, when he saw that M'Candlish did not seem to like the idea of being behind all the time, he went on—

"A'course if yer like ter be in front you can 'ave a try ter git there, an' I don't say that Tommy 'asn't got the toe neither, but it'll take yer all the way from 'ere to Ecklin to do it. I don't mind that," he added, "I'd like it ; but it would hardly be the thing for a parson, would it? First time at Ecklin, too."

This piece of logic was too much for M'Candlish, and saying rather discontentedly, "I suppose you are right," he settled down to the second place, resolved to dodge what mud he could and take the remainder in a Christian spirit.

It was a sorry figure indeed that dismounted in

the yard at the Ecklin church a little later in the day. The clothes and hat that had been so carefully brushed before he left home were covered with dirty mud. The cuffs and collar so spotlessly white were nearly black, while on his neck between the points of his collar a great splotch of clay stuck fast like a huge rosette.

However, before he went into church this latter was pointed out and removed, friendly hands wiped his face with a handkerchief, and a little later he was inside the building preaching to a crowded congregation.

Dick the Dasher remained outside sitting on the fence ; and when asked why he had not gone in to hear the new parson, he replied that he was bound to go and hear him at Brucknell in the afternoon, and long experience had taught him that it was nearly a hundred to one that the parson would preach the same sermon. "And," he said decisively, "I don't like my cabbage boiled twice." Consequently, when Dick came home he was unable to tell us what kind of a preacher M'Candlish was, although he thought he had made a good impression.

When the service was over at Ecklin it was necessary for M'Candlish to hurry away, in order to return here for his lunch, and then go across

to Brucknell for the service at three o'clock ; so having mounted Tommy he shouted, " Goodbye all " to the crowd in the churchyard, and followed Dick the Dasher, who was already through the gate. Scarcely had he reached the middle of the road, however, before he was overtaken by two of the " younger women," as Paul calls them. They had been singing in the choir ; but now, mounted on horseback, they cantered easily by, with a look on their faces which said, as plainly as a look could say, " Would you like a gallop ? "

M'Candlish understood the saying too, and his spirit leapt within him to accept the challenge, but he knew full well that a parson who raced the girls home from church after his first service would not be likely to have much influence for good with the people afterwards ; also he had all the Scotch reverence for the Lord's Day, so he restrained himself and Tommy too ; and the " younger women," seeing he was not to be tempted, first held back for a hundred yards or so, in order to let him get well ahead, and then, letting their horses go, they came by at a furious gallop, one on either side, half smothering him with mud from their horses' hoofs, and shouting with laughter. They and

Dick the Dasher, who was not troubled about Sabbath observance, had it for about a mile or so down the road to the finger-post, where they turned off for home. They waved Dick a goodbye with their riding-whips, bidding him be a good boy, take care of the parson, and not to let him dirty his clothes.

Dick reined in at the finger-post and waited, and when M'Candlish came up shouted—

“I say.”

“Well?”

“Why is this finger-post like a parson?”

“I wonder?”

“Because it points the way it never goes itself.”

“Think so,” said M'Candlish quietly. “I used to think that way myself, but I've altered my mind lately, and since you ask me, I've made up my mind that I'm not only going to point the way that people ought to go, but I'm going to lead them, and God helping me, I'll make sure of you, anyhow.”

Dick thought it time to change the subject, so shouting out, “Come on, or we'll be late,” he dug his heels into his horse and went to his old position; and once more M'Candlish, to his deep disgust, found himself riding through a hail of mud. However, he had made up his

mind to make the best of everything, so he suffered it as stoically as possible.

And this parson, like others who went before him, might have gone on suffering it to the end of the chapter, had he not accidentally caught a glimpse of Master Dick's face just as they emerged from a particularly deep and dirty bog. The parson was satisfied instantly that Dick was having the loan of him, and he resolved to be revenged at the first opportunity ; but in the meantime he kept his discovery to himself, and waited his chance. Presently it came, as chances do to the man who can wait.

They were approaching a wretchedly bad patch of bog, fully ten yards wide, and at sight of it the parson's heart grew glad within him ; and when the unsuspecting Dick was about fifty yards away, M'Candlish sat down on Tommy and raced him at it. Tommy, despite his somewhat ungainly appearance, had quite a surprising turn of foot. He responded gallantly. Dick the Dasher, for once in his life, was caught napping ; he saw his danger, but too late to save himself. The parson beat him into the bog by more than a length, and a few seconds later, when he had got Tommy quietened down sufficiently to be able to look back, to his huge

delight he saw that the Dasher was pulled up by the wayside, trying with a handkerchief to remove the mud from his eyes.

"You caught me napping that time, parson," he said, as he restored the handkerchief to his pocket. The parson acknowledged the fact with becoming modesty, and then they rode on again, but now side by side and silently, Dick the Dasher being full of serious thought. And strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless the solemn truth, that by beating him at his own game M'Candlish that day gained an influence for good over the harum-scarum Dick that has never waned one iota from that time to this.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST SUNDAY AT BRUCKNELL

UNLESS you have lived in the bush, and have had to do with ministers and congregations, you will scarcely be able to realise how anxious I felt about the service to be held that afternoon in Brucknell Church. I was hoping with all my heart that M'Candlish would make a good impression, for when the last word has been said, the life of a Church is in the hands of its minister.

I was not sure of M'Candlish. As a rule one can judge fairly correctly by a man's appearance whether or not he is likely to be a preacher; but M'Candlish, like so many of the colonials, was a puzzle. He might be anything or nothing, and I was more than half afraid that he would prove to be the latter. And as this thought grew upon me my heart sank, for we had had so many failures in the immediate past that I felt the district could scarcely survive another one.

On the other hand, if M'Candlish were a good preacher, and would keep the girls at arm's length, be a man's man, and visit the people, there was no reason why we should not have good times in the near future.

All this and a great deal more was surging through my mind as the hour drew near when the problem would be solved. And as I picked my way along the track by the stub fence that led from our place to the church, my heart went out in prayer to God for the new parson, that he might be all he should be.

The Brucknell church stands opposite the State School, on a hill overlooking a deep valley which leads down to Curdie's River, and this valley I had to cross on my way. When I came to the top of the hill opposite the church I was surprised to see what a number of people were about the place, and when I had crossed the valley and got to the gate, I found that, with few exceptions, all Brucknell, so to speak, besides a crowd of people from Timboon, Digneys, and other places had come out to hear the new parson preach; for thanks to Dick the Dasher and Alex Black, M'Candlish's fame as an ex-jockey had spread like wild-fire, and a host of people who

never under any ordinary circumstances went to church, came that day out of curiosity to see and hear him. Such a motley crowd I had never seen about the place before.

I did not feel like talking, so I merely nodded to those about and made my way inside to wait until the preacher came ; for I have found that if one wants to worship God it is best to go early, and sit quietly inside the church for a little time before the service begins. For then the spirit of the place seems to enter into the soul, and prepares one to meet with God. So I sat and waited, and as I did so my heart and my thoughts calmed down within me.

The people kept dropping in, and it was evident that we were to have, what we had not had for many a long day, a full church. And as I noted this my spirits rose, for there are few things more pleasing to an office-bearer than to see his church full of people.

Presently the crowd that had been standing outside, smoking and talking, came hurriedly trooping in, and a minute later the new parson followed them, clad in overcoat, leggings, and spurs, the latter clanking loudly on the floor as he marched up the aisle. Arrived at the front, he took off his overcoat and threw it

across a chair, his leggings were pitched into the corner, the spurs followed them, and then walking to the pulpit he knelt down behind it to pray.

When he rose to his feet and faced us I was struck with the exceeding youthfulness of his appearance, and my heart misgave me when I looked round upon the many strong and intelligent faces in the congregation. It did not seem possible that such a boy could preach acceptably to such an audience.

However, the "boy" did not appear in the least degree terrified or affrighted. He gave out the opening hymn in his slow, quiet way; and when he had done so, Alex Black, who had been listening critically, leant across to Dick the Dasher and whispered—

"'E won't set the river on fire."

"Well, who wants the river set on fire?" Dick replied, and then added, "You wait till yer see."

M'Candlish read a verse of a hymn; it was an old hymn, and we knew it well, but he read it in a way that seemed to change it entirely, and so to fill it with new meaning, that many of us looked at our books a second time to be sure that we had got the right one.

After the hymn was sung he prayed. A

tender, simple prayer it was, and very brief; and to those of us who had been used to prayers of a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes' duration, it was an unspeakable relief, and predisposed us all in his favour.

After another hymn he opened the Bible and began to read, and as he went on the interest deepened. I have often groaned within myself when I have heard the magnificent language of the Psalms gabbled over in dull, monotonous tones by men who really ought to know better; and a dozen times over have I urged young men to lay to heart Paul's advice to Timothy, and "give attention to the reading." But M'Candlish needed no such advice; he seemed to have got to the very heart of the passage, and brought it out so clearly by the mere expression with which he read that the twenty-seventh Psalm has been a living reality to me ever since.

Nine out of ten of our new ministers take for their first text Paul's words to the Corinthians: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"; and begin their ministry by setting the standard so high that they are never able to live up to it. We were quite prepared for the old passage, and it was almost a shock

to us when the new parson gave out instead Matt. iii. 1, 2 : "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

When he came forward to speak he stood quite motionless, his arms hung limply by his sides, as though they were merely fastened on his coat and he had no control over them. When he looked down the church his eyes were half closed, dreamy and lacklustre ; preaching appeared to require far more exertion than he was capable of, and altogether he looked too lazy and indolent for anything.

At the beginning of his address he spoke with a drawl and in a kind of "sing-song" style that would have driven a master of elocution mad, and I was not surprised to hear Alex Black remark very audibly, "W'y don't 'e sing it?" Yet M'Candlish was a master of elocution second to few, and very soon everybody knew and felt it.

Whence or how it came about I cannot tell, but this I know, the magic of his speech speedily worked in our midst some charm from which we were powerless to escape. Soon a great silence reigned, and saints and sinners alike were bent forward

eagerly listening for every word that fell from his lips. John Davies, the local preacher, leant over me and whispered, "He's got 'em," meaning the crowd. "Got 'em" he certainly had, gripped to himself by hooks of eloquent, earnest words ; and, what's more, he kept them to the end.

To many present it was a revelation of the power of human speech, others felt as though they had been ambushed and trapped, and compelled into an undignified interest, and were almost inclined to resent it. They had been taken unawares, at a disadvantage, and reverence for his ability struggled hard with dislike of being surprised. As for myself, I have heard many great preachers both before and since that day, but I have yet to hear the equal of Robert M'Candlish. Dick the Dasher sat the sermon through like one in a dream, and when it was finished, and the spell broken, he drew a deep breath and looked things unutterable.

"It's the old secret of the gods that they come in low disguises" ; and thus M'Candlish came to us ; but long before the service was over the disguise fell away, and we knew him for what he was, a very prince of preachers. And when the benediction was pronounced, and

he came marching down the church in a genial, friendly way, and shook hands with everybody as they passed out of the door, my joy was full, and bowing my head in my hands I gave thanks to God.

Ten minutes later our new parson, mackintoshed, legginged, and spurred, was in the saddle galloping home to tea, preparatory to his twelve mile ride to Nullawarre for the evening service.

CHAPTER X

THE YOUNGER WOMEN

“Treat the younger women as sisters.”—PAUL.

“Fly far from that which is stronger than yourself, the contest is unequal between a charming young girl and a beginner in philosophy.”—EPICTETUS.

A HOME missionary is, above all things, a beginner in philosophy: he begins at the very beginning, and, as a rule, he learns much of the philosophy of life in many an unequal contest of the kind described by Epictetus. His chief trouble is that he has no idea that he is even remotely engaged in a contest until it is all over and he finds himself rolling in the dust.

It is his to wrestle, so he believes, not against pink and white, or freckled, or brown, or olive-coloured flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual

wickedness in high places. And he is very courageous in the fight against these spiritual foes ; he bares his sword and smites them hip and thigh, then, alas ! he delivers himself, bound hand and foot, into their power, because he forgets that Satan has a way of taking upon himself the form of a woman and appears as an angel of light. The powers of the air being crafty, catch the beginner in philosophy with guile.

From the days of Samson down, whenever the Lord brings out a strong man against the Philistines, the devil has found that his best move is to bring out a charming young woman ; and although the man may eventually pull down the temple on the heads of God's enemies, yet his life is robbed of a great deal of its usefulness, and he enters through much tribulation into his rest.

More beginners in philosophy, by which I mean just now young ministers, missionaries, and students, are broken and cast out on the Church's rubbish-heap by means of fair young women, who wish them well, than by all the devils in the bottomless pit.

It's the old, old story this : the son of man is wounded in the house of his friends, and those friends the fairest, truest, most

sympathetic, and hard working in the Church of God—the younger women.

“Treat them as sisters,” wrote Paul to the youthful Timothy : “Treat the younger women as sisters.” And I have often wondered if Timothy followed Paul’s advice ; and presuming that he did, whether in after years he regarded Paul as an infallible authority on women. I greatly doubt it.

To compare Epictetus and Paul in a general way is like comparing *Hamlet* with “Jack and the Bean Stalk.” One chapter from Paul has done more to influence the world for good than all the discourses of Epictetus put together ; and yet on this subject the teaching of Epictetus is as much wiser than that of Paul, as Paul’s teaching is wiser than that of Epictetus on all other subjects ; which just serves to illustrate the truth of the Master’s saying, that in certain cases “the children of this world are wiser than the children of light.”

Robert M’Candlish was a beginner in philosophy ; he was also a devout student of the otherworldly Paul, but unfortunately for himself, so it seemed, and for the Church of God in the Heytesbury forest, at that time he had no knowledge of Epictetus.

Behold, then, this beginner in philosophy

upon a bright May morning going forth to unequal contest with a charming young girl.

What a morning that was ! For three days there had been no rain to speak of, but the previous night a dense fog had enveloped everything in its clammy mantle, and now there came a morning of surpassing brightness, and lo ! the whole forest—trees, shrubs, and bushes—was linked together by long, clinging threads of silky spider-web, and suspended therefrom in every conceivable direction millions of designs in point-lace, nets, d'oyleys, and antimacassars, all of them baptized in the dew of the morning and glistening like polished silver in the radiant sunshine.

It was one of those fairy days when the spiders take possession of the earth, and there are no days like them. We do not get many of them in any one year, so when they come he that is wise and will observe these things will go out of doors and drink deeply of the joy of life, for at such times it fills heaven and earth.

Behold, then, the beginner in philosophy on such a day as this, with his hands in his pockets and his head in the clouds, going forth to unequal contest with a charming girl and never dreaming that the battle hour had come.

Behold, too, the "younger woman," mounted on a mad-headed, white-legged chestnut mare, both of them drunk with the rich new wine of that day of all days, and tearing across the grass-tree plain towards the belt of timber as though all the wolves of all the Russias were after them. Look upon this Delilah, I say, with her shameless hair flying loose behind her, her wonderful eyes dancing with excitement, and her red lips parted to let you see how white and even are her teeth. Also her upper lip had a way of curling a little higher on the right side of her mouth when she smiled ; and I've known one glimpse of that feature to turn men giddy in her presence and haunt them ever after in their dreams.

And nothing will do her to-day but that she must wear a blouse of some indescribable colour that not only fits her to perfection, but manages to bring out, in all their man-subduing power, the wanton splendours of her plump round arms, her great white throat, and full, deep breast, now heaving like the sea with the exertion of her ride.

Look upon this Delilah, I say, charging down upon our unsuspecting beginner in philosophy, our Samson, and tell me what chance has he,

strong man though he undoubtedly is ; what chance has such as he in a contest so unequal ?

Ah, Delilah, when I think of you as you came that day, galloping on horseback into the life of God's strong man, to shatter his prospects and spoil his work, I could find it in my heart to flog you with your own riding-whip ; and again, when I think of what you suffered, I could find it in my heart to take you in my arms and comfort you, for after all, poor Delilah, was it a very grave offence in you that the supreme desire of your life was to be good, and to do good ; and that in your innocence you thought the best way to achieve that end was to marry a minister and be an helpmeet to him ? Assuredly not. You also were but a beginner in philosophy.

But I must not anticipate. Delilah of the shameless hair—in ancient times it was Samson whose hands were strengthened by his hair ; to-day the woman has that advantage—Delilah with her hair streaming out behind her like a battle-flag, raced along the track and into the forest, while Samson, still with his hands in his pockets and his thoughts in the clouds, was swinging along on the same track, but in the opposite direction.

Suddenly the thunder of galloping hoofs

smote upon Samson's ear, and a horse and rider swept round the trees and full upon him—cavalry charging infantry upon a narrow and muddy road. The infantry was quite unprepared for attack; there could be but one result. So when the charge was over the infantry, completely routed, stood by the wayside, wiping his face clean from the mud scornfully cast upon him by Whitelegs.

Presently the cavalry wheeled round and returned to the charge. Delilah recognised him, and thought he had recognised her, otherwise she had gone right on; as it was she came back to apologise.

The beginner in philosophy was just now most opportunely strengthened by something other than philosophy; to be plain, his eyes were blinded with mud. Eye-gate for the time being was impregnable, and the wavy brown hair, the glancing eyes, and mobile lips assaulted it in vain. Her most deadly artillery was utterly useless; he could not see her, and, like the ostrich, he was safe.

But there are other gates to the soul of Samson: Ear-gate, Touch-gate. Delilah—all unwittingly, perhaps—concentrates her forces upon these. Leaping lightly down and tying Whitelegs to a stump, she gathers her riding

“habit” about her, and advances to the assault on foot. First upon Ear-gate :

“I’m so sorry,” she began.

The strong man is taken by surprise ; he had not heard her approach, and or ever he is aware, Ear-gate is lost to him.

“Excuse me,” he falters, “I can’t see you ; the fact is I—I’ve got some mud in my eyes.”

“I’m so sorry, it’s all my fault, if——”

But the beginner in philosophy will not hear of such a thing.

“No fear,” he says, “it was not your fault at all.”

But the charming woman persists—

“It was my fault ; I had no right to be galloping along here like that, not looking where I was going. Couldn’t I do something to help you?”

“I don’t know. What would you suggest?”

“Well, there’s a log at your feet—just you sit down on it, and I’ll see.”

The beginner in philosophy sat down, and the charming woman, taking from her breast a queer little handkerchief that sent forth a sweet, subtle perfume, worked a corner of it up to a point ; then placing her left hand on his forehead, and resting the lower part of the

right on his cheek, she began to clear the way for the taking of Eye-gate.

Then and there, at contact with those soft, white hands, Touch-gate fell, and two-thirds of the soul of the strong man was at the mercy of the "younger woman."

Months afterwards he would dream sometimes that soft hands were touching his face and a soft voice was speaking to him, while a subtle perfume stole in upon his senses. Those were very sweet dreams, but the days that followed them were always sad days.

Delilah alternately poked and wiped, and pulled his eyelashes first down and then up, while Samson oscillated between a heaven of pleasure and a hell of pain. Nevertheless Eye-gate still held out, and the attack was failing. But Delilah is a general of resource, and presently she bethought herself, and tried a flank movement. Taking Samson's hat from his head, she went to a little limestone creek near by, and brought the hat back filled to the brim with clear, cold water.

"Now," she said, holding the hat before him, "put your face down in this water—right in, and open your eyes and look about.

Samson, already shorn of two-thirds of his

strength, obeyed, and presently, with a sigh of relief—

“ Ah, that’s better.”

Then Delilah, “ Keep your eyes down in the water until you can see clearly.”

A minute later Samson raised his head, the mud had all gone to the bottom of the hat. Delilah wiped the water from his face and the point of his nose just as though he had been a crying child and she his mother. “ Now,” he said, “ thanks to you, it’s all——”

Then he staggered heavily in his speech, and fell silent, and the reason why he did so was simply this. For many a long day he had been seeking a woman whose likeness was engraved upon his heart, and when he looked for the first time into the wonderful eyes and upon the beautiful features of Jinny Stirling, he thought for the moment that he had found her.

Eye-gate was taken by storm, the garrison surrendered, and the beginner in philosophy was at the mercy of the charming woman.

Alas! alas! how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice.

CHAPTER XI

WHILE THE LOGS WERE BURNING

IT was the time when settlers in the Heytesbury go out to do their burning off ; for every year on these forest farms of ours, what with the axe and the storms, a great many trees come down and litter all the ground. So after the early rains have fallen and made it safe, the selectors go out and pile the logs together in great heaps and set fire to them ; and in April and May, when these fires are going on all the farms, the forest at night is like a fairy land.

It is the custom to keep the fires burning day and night, consequently it is necessary for some one to go the rounds of them the last thing before bed ; and on our selection this bit of work generally fell to the lot of Dick the Dasher.

One night as Dick was about to start,

M'Candlish came out of his room and said that he would accompany him ; so the two went off together, and a fine time they had of it, pushing the big logs together with crowbars, tossing smaller ones into the midst of the flames, and watching the sparks fly upward like swarms of golden bees.

But when they had finished the last fire in the corner of the top paddock, they struck out into a track and sauntered back towards the house ; and as they did so, suddenly fell to talking of serious things, and it came about in this way.

Before M'Candlish left his home to take up this mission work, he had promised God on his knees that he would speak to everybody whom he got to know about their souls ; but he was finding out in those early days what most sincere men do find out, and that is, that the hardest thing in the world to do is to speak to people about the deep things of their lives. And so far as Dick was concerned, his promise was still unfulfilled.

Several times he had an opportunity to speak, but had not taken advantage of it, and afterwards he despised himself for his failure. Night after night he had lain across his bed, groaning in spirit, because of his cowardice ; he

had pleaded for pardon and strength, and had promised to do better in future ; but the days and the opportunities had gone by, and still Dick had not been spoken to ; and as he thought of his unfaithfulness, M'Candlish shrank within himself for very shame.

To-night, however, God's word seemed like a burning fire shut up in his bones, and like Jeremiah he was weary with forbearing and he could not stay ; so it came to pass that when they had finished their work and turned into the track for home, he faced Dick suddenly and said—

“ Dick, do you ever think of good things ? ”

Dick's answer, coming as it did from such a radical, rather astonished him.

“ I'm alwus thinkin' about them.”

“ You are ? ”

“ Yes, I am, day and night ; I think and think, but the more I think the more fogged I get.”

“ You're not a Christian, then ? ”

“ No,” said Dick, rather bitterly, “ I'm not a Christian, I'm a long way from it.”

“ Would you like to be a Christian ? ”

“ Would I wot ? I'd give anythink in the world to be one.”

“ You would ? ”

“ Yas, I would.”

"Well, what's the difficulty?"

"Difficulty! it's all difficulty."

They walked on a few paces in silence, then the parson came to a halt close by a huge fire near the roadside, and turning full upon Dick he said—

"Do you believe in Jesus, Dick?"

Dick answered at once, "Yas, I believe in Jesus all right."

"Then you must be saved."

"There's no must about it; I ain't saved."

"If you were to die now, this minute, where do you reckon you would go?"

"I'd go ter hell."

"You would?"

"Yas."

"Then you can't believe in Jesus, and it's no use saying you do."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, Jesus says in the sixth chapter of the gospel of John, 'He that believeth in Me *hath*,' not may have, or is going to have, but '*hath*' 'everlasting life.'"

Dick thought a moment over this, then he answered—

"Didn't I say it was all difficulty? I know I believe in Jesus, and I know I ain't got everlasting life, an' there I am."

M'Candlish looked thoughtfully into the fire for a minute or so, then he said reflectively—

“ I'll tell you what it is, Dick, there's such a thing as an active belief in Jesus, and there's such a thing as a passive belief.”

“ Wot the dooce is that ? ”

“ It's like this,” the parson replied, speaking slowly and argumentatively. “ Some time ago a ship got on to a reef in a storm, and then it was only a question of time until she broke up and went to the bottom, and the passengers gave themselves up for lost. But presently a great cry arose, ‘ The lifeboat !—the lifeboat ! ’ and sure enough there she was—a lifeboat coming to save them. When she got near enough a line was thrown to her, and she came right alongside, and all got safe on board—all but one man, and he refused to go : he saw the lifeboat, he believed she had come to save him, he believed she could save him, but somehow he would not trust his life to her ; and consequently while he lingered the ship broke up and he went to the bottom with her.

“ Now,” said M'Candlish, “ that illustrates what I mean by an active and a passive belief. The people who got into the boat had an active belief—a belief that made them act, and they were saved, while the man who stayed behind

had a passive belief. He believed in the boat sure enough, but his belief didn't influence his actions, it didn't carry him into the boat, and consequently he was lost.

"And," the parson went on, "it strikes me very forcibly, Dick, that your belief in Jesus is just the same as that man's belief in the boat. You see Jesus—the heavenly lifeboat—coming over the rough seas of life to save you from eternal shipwreck and death ; you believe in the lifeboat ; you believe He has come to save you ; but that's as far as you get. Your belief doesn't lead you to put your life in His keeping, therefore it is passive and useless. What you need is a good, strong, active belief that will lead you to get into the lifeboat and be saved. Now," he asked, "do you see the point?"

"Yas," said Dick, who was now sitting on a low log, staring into the fire, "yas, I see it ; it's as clear as—mud."

The parson was somewhat taken aback by this reply and a little nettled too, for he felt that he had made his point plain ; so there was a rather awkward silence, and both men were wrapped in deep thought. However, after a while Dick looked up at the missionary and said—

"Mr. M'Candlish, were you alwus a Christian?"

It was the parson's turn now, and almost in Dick's own words, and with something approaching a groan in his voice, he replied—

“I? No, I was not—far from it. But why do you ask?”

“Well,” said Dick, “I can't make head nor tail of active belief, and passive belief, an all that sort ov thing; but I've got an idea that if you wos ter tell me 'ow you come ter be a Christian, it might 'elp me a bit.”

M'Candlish sat in silence for a minute or so, then he said—

“There's a part of my life, Dick, that I never care to think of, let alone speak about, for whenever I do, all its waves and its billows come roaring back across my soul, and it's anything but pleasant; but if it would help you in any way I don't mind telling you—and after all,” he added reflectively, “I really believe that testimony is the most effective way of preaching the gospel; Paul never seemed to lose an opportunity to tell what God had done for his soul, and why should I?”

CHAPTER XII

IN A FAR COUNTRY

“The fatted calf was dressed for him,
But the husks had a greater zest for him;
The pigs he thinks are the best for him,
And he’s off again to the sties.”

ALEX. SKENE.

“WELL,” said the parson, “to begin at the beginning, I had a good mother, who taught me to pray, and made me attend Sunday school and church; and so far as I can remember, when I was a child I was anxious to do good and be good, and I had a great dislike for swearing and things of that kind; but side by side with this dislike for evil things I had a passionate love for sport and fun, and it was along those lines that the devil got at me.

“Like most Scotch colonials, all our folk were fond of dancing, and my mother, though a godly woman, could see no harm in it, so

when I was about fifteen years old I began attending quadrilles to learn to dance.

“Dancing came to me as naturally as flying comes to a bird ; it filled my life, and in a very short time it so grew upon me that, in a manner of speaking, I lived to dance and danced to live, and my troubles began there ; for in between the dances the older fellows used to go out for drinks, and it was not long before they began asking me to go with them.

“At first I refused to go, but I soon got to feel that it was unmanly not to drink, so one night I went out with them.

“I was the last of all to enter the pub, and I went in feeling as wretched and guilty as though I had been going in to commit a robbery, and when they asked me what I was going to have, I said—very much to their amusement—‘lemonade and raspberry.’ The drink nearly choked me, and I did not breathe freely till I was out in the street once more ; and when I got there I thought I should never enter a public-house again.

“However, in a little time that feeling wore off, and I did go again, and somehow that time I did not feel so bad. I continued going, and after a little while I began to like going, and a day came when it was I who did the asking,

and led the whole crowd up to the bar. May God forgive me !

“ Well, there were other things about those dancing days, Dick—things which I heard and saw, and took part in, which I would gladly tear out of the book of my life, and forget for ever if only I could. But it would do no good to tell of them, for it is a shame for a Christian even to speak of some things. But to make a long story short, when I was eighteen years old what I did not know of that world was not knowledge.

“ I was brought up side by side with one of the greatest jockeys who ever crossed an Australian horse. I knew the pedigrees and performances of every racehorse of any note in the colony. There was never a meeting within reach that I was not at, and there was never a race of any importance in Melbourne that I did not have something on.

“ I knew the heights, weights, measurements, and performances of all the pugilists, from John L. Sullivan down to Nipper Peakes, and gloried in their achievements. I could and did play football with the best. I was something of a pedestrian too, for I could cut my hundred yards out in a fraction over even time, and not many can do that. I used to train

with two of the best men then on the track.

“ Altogether, Dick, before I was a man’s age, like the prodigal son, I was in a far country, far away from God and innocence, wasting my substance, spiritual and temporal, in riotous living.

“ Yes, I went down very low, and my speech was quite on a par with the rest of my life. I think I excelled in swearing, for I can remember hearing a doctor say that he would ‘back young M’Candlish to outcurse the Cardinal of Rheims, who cursed every feather out of the jackdaw’ ; and I suppose he had good grounds for saying what he did.

“ Sometimes I wonder why God allowed the son of my mother to sink so low, and then I think that possibly He did so that I might know all about it, and be able to return there and bring back some of the poor wretches who sit, as I did then, on the doorstep of hell.”

The parson paused awhile, and poked the fire thoughtfully with a stick, then he went on again.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

“WELL, the climax came at last. It was one Saturday night, after a football match. We had given our opponents a dinner in one of the public-houses and had then made a night of it. The door of the room in which we were stood open towards the street, and all the evening a crowd of people stood about it watching our doings.

“I drank a great deal too much and acted the fool right through the piece, and just before midnight I was sitting at the piano, playing as well as I could in my half-drunken state, and singing some song so full of filthy suggestion that no decent man would have defiled his mouth with it, when I chanced to look across at the door, and there on the outskirts of the crowd I saw the face of my mother.

"I had only a glimpse of her, for she disappeared instantly ; but there was that in her face—such pain, such anguish, such love and longing—that the beastly words were frozen on my lips and my fingers stiffened on the keys ; however, I soon recovered myself a bit, and, staggering to my feet, said, ' Lads, I'm going home ! ' I doubt very much if I would have got away, only it happened just then that the publican came in to say that it was close-up time, so we all went out into the night.

"I hardly know how I got home, but when I did I saw that a light was shining in my mother's room ; but all was silent about the place, so I concluded that she had gone to bed, and perhaps to sleep, leaving the lamp burning. I hoped so, anyway. I got into my own bed as best I could, but notwithstanding all the drink I had taken, ' that night could not the king sleep,' and I lay tossing from side to side tortured with my thoughts.

"I must have been lying awake for a considerable time, when I became conscious of a sound that came from my mother's room. It was as though she were speaking, but in a broken, passionate way, so different to her usually calm, soft tones, that I was startled, and sat up to listen ; then I was sure of it,

and wondering greatly, I got softly out of bed, and crept along the passage to her door.

"The light was still burning and the door partly open, so I peeped in, and then drew back burning with shame and remorse, for my mother was kneeling by the bedside, her grey hair was unloosed and streaming down upon her shoulders, and with strong crying and tears she was pleading with God for me.

"Dick, did you ever hear your mother cry?" But without waiting for a reply the parson went on again, though in husky tones and with great difficulty—

"I think I would rather shoot myself than hear my mother cry. I know I would rather be damned in hell than make her cry ; I would.

"It was simply terrible to stand there and hear her, and to know that I was the cause of her grief ; but it was just the thing I needed to bring me to my senses, for there and then what Jesus said of the prodigal son became true of me. I 'came to myself.' I think I must have been mad until then. I didn't know, didn't think what I was doing ; but there in the passage, at my mother's bedroom door, I woke up, I saw myself ; and when I realised what a brute I had been my spirit within me

was overwhelmed, and I grew fairly sick with remorse.

“You know, Dick, I was the only son of my mother, and she was a widow, and instead of being a help and joy and blessing I had been a grief and a shame. Instead of supporting her gently down the hill of life until she came to her rest at the foot, as I should have done, I was savagely thrusting her on, and bringing down her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Oh, it was terrible ! And when all this came to me, I think if ever any one suffered the tortures of the damned while still in the flesh it was I.

“Talk about hell, Dick ! The Bible tells us that God is more tender-hearted and loving, and longs more after His children than any earthly mother ; and if that be so, I can't think of any hotter hell than some time and place—and it might be in the heart of heaven itself—but some place where a man comes to himself, sees what he has been, sees what he might have been, and looks upon the grief of the great Father whose heart he has broken. That would be hell, hell in the concrete, and the ravens of remorse would eat at that man's heart for ever, as the ravens picked the liver of Tityus in the old Greek story. May God save us from such a fate as that ! ”

And Dick the Dasher said "Amen!"

By this time the parson was thoroughly roused, and for the last few minutes had been striding up and down before the fire. Pausing now for a moment, he lifted the crowbar and rolled the logs together, and then piled such a heap of brushwood on top that the flames fairly roared aloft, and obliged them to go further away from the heat; then he continued his story.

"Well, I went back to my room and to bed, but I did not close my eyes until the dawn; then I fell into a troubled sleep, and when I awoke the Sunday-school bell was ringing for the morning school, and I heard the cheerful tinkle of china as my mother laid the table for breakfast.

"I half expected that mother would have something to say about the doings of the night before, but not one word of reproof or blame fell from her lips; she was just as patient and tender as ever she had been in her life. Still it was a difficult meal for us both, and I was glad when it was done.

"I had long since got out of the way of going to church, and had promised to spend the day with some friends who lived a few miles out in the country; so when breakfast was over I got myself ready to go, but there was such

a wistful look in my mother's eyes as I came out of my room that it went to my heart, and I said—

“‘I must go to-day, mother, for I've promised, but I'll be home to tea, and we'll go to church together.’ And at my words there came such a brightness over her face that I knew I had said the right thing.

“‘Very well,’ she said, ‘and we'll go to hear Robert Robertson.’

“This Robert Robertson of whom my mother spoke was an evangelist, who was then holding a mission in the Baptist church. I had heard a great deal about him, and was rather curious to hear him speak ; consequently I was very willing that we should go, so I promised and went away.

“Well, the night came, and we set out for church. We were not late, but there was such a crowd there that we had to take a seat close up to the front, right under the preacher's eye.

“Robert Robertson is a born preacher. Some day I hope you may have the privilege of hearing him. His descriptive powers are very wonderful, and one of the puzzles of my life is to know why his great gifts have never been properly recognised in Australia, but I suppose it's the old story, ‘A

prophet is not without honour—save in his own country.’ He may come to his own yet, and I hope with all my heart he will ; but anyway, that night he was at his best, and some of the pictures he painted are shining before my eyes to this day. He gripped me as I had never been gripped before, and the hooks by which he held me were hooks of tenderness and love.

“There was a prayer-meeting afterwards, and I stayed with my mother until it was over ; but I did not decide that night although I wished to, for I felt like one upon the brink of hell. However, I went again the following night, and continued going through the week, but each day found me more miserable and hopeless.

“Thursday night came, and Robertson preached from the text, ‘Neither do I condemn thee ; go, and sin no more.’ I don’t know what he said about it, but somehow God riveted those words on my mind. When I got home I looked them up and read them for myself ; and while I was reading it came to me that no matter how low I had fallen, even if, like that poor woman, I were the very scum of the earth, there was mercy still for me. ‘Neither do I condemn, thee ; go, and sin no more.’ It was

the voice of Jesus speaking to my soul, and I believed His word.

"When I sat down in the church the next night, I was shaking like a leaf in the wind ; and I was a leaf, a human one, stirred by the breath of the Holy Spirit. Well, after some time, those who were anxious about their souls were asked to stand up. I stood, clinging to the seat in front of me for support, and when the after-meeting was announced, I stayed behind.

"And it strikes me, Dick, when I come to think of it, that I found just the same difficulty as yourself, for when they spoke of faith and belief, I only seemed to get perplexed and confused, and at last, to the great grief of my mother, I went away still unsaved ; for try as I might I could not understand what they were endeavouring to explain to me."

The parson paused again deep in thought, and continued so long silent that Dick the Dasher said—

"Well, and what did you do then ?"

"What did I do then?" M'Candlish repeated, slowly and meditatively, after Dick, "What did I do then? Why," rousing himself up and facing the Dasher, "I went home and knelt down by my bedside, and gave my life to God

—I gave him all I had and all I hoped for. It wasn't very much, it's true, but such as I had I gave, to be His alone and for ever ; and I asked Him for Christ's sake to forgive and blot out all the past, and to make me a Christian, and He did.

“In five minutes I was a changed being ; from that moment the things, sinful things, I had loved I hated, and the things of God that I used to hate I began to love. I don't know how the change was wrought in my soul, but this I do know : in that hour I was born of God's Spirit and became His child. My misery passed away like flood-waters, and a great peace and a holy rapture so filled me that I had to cry out, ‘Praise God ! Praise God !’

“And my mother, listening anxiously, heard my cry, and came where I was, and put her arms about me and wept over me, and kissed me, and prayed for me, and praised God. That's how I became a Christian, Dick.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE TIMBOON BAND OF HOPE

THE origin of the Timboon Band of Hope, like that of Stonehenge, is lost in antiquity. I cannot recall its first meeting, neither do I know any man who can; but I have a very vivid recollection of the first one attended by M'Candlish, and of what followed it.

In the lean years which preceded the coming of M'Candlish to Timboon the society led a very precarious existence, chiefly because it was the custom to finish up each public meeting with a dance.

This dancing question always has been a cause of contention between different factions of Church people, and at Timboon there was no exception to the rule. The committee of the Band of Hope, with perhaps one exception, were strong for dancing,

while the missionary, whoever he might be, was generally strong against it, and finding it impossible to reform the committee he did his best to strangle its energy, and generally succeeded.

However, when M'Candlish came amongst us with a great reputation as a temperance man, the committee got together and elected him president, and arranged for a public meeting at an early date, while another committee, self-elected, arranged for the dance to follow.

M'Candlish was such an all-round good sort of a fellow that the dancers felt sure that at last they had got a man after their own heart, and Mr. Bill M'Guire, who, as I have already indicated, was General Organiser and Master of Ceremonies at all public functions, took the earliest opportunity to waylay him and ask him his opinion about the matter, fully expecting to hear him say that he could see no harm in it whatever.

But M'Candlish's experience in that direction had been a bitter one, and as he was in the way of speaking of things as he found them, he answered Mr. M'Guire bluntly and to the point ; and the hope that had sprung up in that agreeable gentleman's manly breast died a sudden and violent death.

“Look here, Bill,” said M’Candlish, “I won’t tell you what my opinion is, but I’ll tell you what I know about the business. There’s dancing and dancing, I know, and dancing in certain circles and in some places may be a very different thing from the kind of dancing I’m most familiar with. I can’t say ; but this I can say, in the town where I lived nine out of ten of the young fellows who go to the dogs through drink, learn to drink and get familiar with public-houses through going to dances, for in the intervals between the dances the older fellows adjourn to the pub for drinks. They can’t very well help asking the younger ones to join them, and the younger fellows can’t very well refuse ; they begin by drinking soft stuff, but they soon get tired of that and go the whole way.

“Another thing, Bill. I reckon that about eight out of ten of the illegitimate children born amongst my class of people owe their origin to dancing. I’m not going into particulars about that, it’s not a nice subject, but I know what I’m talking about. Now, do you need to ask me as a minister where I stand in regard to dancing ? ”

Mr. M’Guire remembered something he had heard the night before in the men’s hut at the

saw-mill and did not answer, so the parson continued—

“No, Mr. M’Guire, it’s my business to save people ; that’s what I’m here for, so I’m not taking any dancing.”

There was silence for a little time ; then the Master of Ceremonies said—

“Well, every man to his own opinion,” which is what we all say when we still cling to our views after having been beaten in argument. And having fired this blank cartridge he turned away and gat him down to the hall to complete his arrangements for the dance.

This being the first Band of Hope meeting held for a long time, the committee resolved to make it a big thing, and so for a month before it came off all the “talent” in the place, temperance and otherwise—mostly otherwise—was gathered together to rehearse dialogues and practise songs and recitations.

When the eventful night came it turned out beautifully fine, and if the mud was somewhat heavy underfoot, overhead a glorious moon shone from a cloudless sky, turning the night into day ; and consequently a great crowd of people, of all sorts, sizes, and denominations, streamed along the moonlit tracks, through the scented scrub to the hall.

The parson went in the afternoon in order to do some visiting. Dick the Dasher left early, carrying his dancing-pumps under his arm, wrapped up in a sheet of the *War Cry*. Dick was intending to cross the river and call for the Blacks on his way, and as it was rather far for the wife to walk, and to drive was impossible, I had to go by myself.

This, however, was no great hardship, for with a full moon riding high in the heavens, a clear, crisp night, the ti-tree, scrub, and mimosas filling the air with fragrance, and the tall messmates and lightwoods towering up to the skies and flinging their weird shadows over all the earth, a quiet walk through this forest is one of the delights of life.

You are not long out before the spirit of the place works its will upon you. Under its subtle inspiration the soul arises and shakes itself from the dust of the day; the dullest sod breathes in the breath of life and becomes a living soul, conscious of a great uplifting towards higher and holier and better things. The night is filled with magic, and floods the heart with a feeling of ecstasy, deep and sweet beyond all telling.

Then and there the eyes of the blind are opened, and he sees things in the dim earth

beneath and in the great star-sprinkled deeps above that are not lawful for him to utter. The ears of the deaf are unstopped, and he catches strains of music, distant and mysterious, that fill his soul with longings inexpressible. Then does the lame man leap as an hart, for the wondrous joy within him. And the tongue of the dumb, of him who hath not in all his life been able to speak the swelling thoughts that surge through the deeps of his soul—even the tongue of him doth sing them out for joy.

Oh you town-bitten, city-cursed sons and daughters of Australia, you know not what you miss! If you would but leave the cities with their accursed softness, and the poor, dismal, artificial fun of the theatre and the music-hall, and come out into the primeval splendours of this far-stretching land, with its lakes and rivers, mighty forests, mountain ranges, grassy table-lands, wide-rolling plains, and great open sky spaces, and breathe the free, fresh air of our vast Australian interior, you would find such a fulness, freshness, breadth, and reality in life that you would shake from your feet the dust of the cities for ever!

And mark it well, that back here to the great hungry heart of Australia, crying for

her people, lies the path of duty, the path of glory, and the path of safety too. And let us all be well assured that if we shirk this duty we court disaster, for if we will not arise and possess this land, or fling wide its gates to our kinsmen across the seas—in the swiftly coming readjustment of the world—another people and another nation, whose god is not our God, will surely come from the north and wrest it from us. Then alas! for our White Australia!

CHAPTER XV

A BUSH CONCERT

WHEN I arrived at the hall, after my walk through the bush, I felt loth to enter in and leave the glories of the night ; however, when I did so, I found the place crowded with an audience composed of farmers, or " Cockies " as we are called down here, their sons and daughters, saw-mill hands, rabbit trappers, and bullockies, with the general flotsam and jetsam to be found floating about in every bush settlement.

The hall was only dimly lighted by a number of antiquated kerosene lamps in huge metal chandeliers, but everybody seemed to be in a good humour, for they were tossing remarks, more or less witty, from one end of the place to the other. Now and again they would stamp unanimously on the floor amid cries of

“Up with the rag!” “Let ’er went!” “Time’s up!” and other remarks of a like nature.

At eight o’clock to the tick M’Candlish appeared on the platform, and said: “Ladies and gentlemen, we will commence our meeting by singing the two hundred and twenty-fourth hymn in Sankey’s,” and gave it out verse by verse. There was no instrument in the hall at that time, and as I was the recognised precentor of the district, all eyes were turned upon me, an unspoken request to start the tune. I am not a good singer, but I can start a hymn at the right pitch for singing, which is what a great many good singers cannot do; so having cleared my throat and squared my shoulders, I struck up the air, and as many as could remember the words joined in.

The singing of the verses was somewhat weak, owing to the fact that we were not provided with books and very few knew the words, but when it came to the chorus—

“We’re marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion,
We’re marching upward to Zion, that beautiful city
of God,”

didn’t they sing!

Some one said, “It’s a wonder they didn’t lift the roof off,” and in a manner of speaking

it was. M'Candlish was keeping time with the hymn-book, and whenever we came to the end of a verse he would wave his arms and shout "Chorus!" like a Salvation Army captain.

It was a big change from that lusty singing to the "moment's prayer" which came next on the programme, but M'Candlish had sense enough to finish his prayer before the lads got restless; and then, the religious part of the meeting having been disposed of, the people settled down to enjoy themselves.

The first item was a duet by the two Miss Westbrooks; both had sweet, pleasing voices, and their singing was always popular. They sang, "What are the wild waves saying?"—a song that never grows old in the bush. And although the audience had heard them sing it many a time before, they seemed to enjoy it as much as ever, and encored it vociferously. Next on the programme came Dick the Dasher. Dick was a born actor and elocutionist, and his fame was forest-wide.

To-night he was to recite "The Lifeboat," and he was doing it splendidly, holding the crowd spellbound; but just as he came to that pathetic part where the old man regains consciousness, the seat in the far corner on

which some saw-mill hands were sitting bunched together, suddenly collapsed with a loud crash, being only a temporary structure made of boards and kerosene boxes, and the saw-millers, amid roars of laughter, rolled on the floor.

It was some time before they were able to reconstruct their seat and order was again restored, and even then Dick seemed somewhat loth to proceed, but eventually, encouraged by such cries as "Go it, Dick!" "Give it more chest!" "Buck in, old man!" "Give it lip!" Dick began again, but the effect was entirely spoilt, no power on earth could bring the people back to a solemn state of mind in so short a time. However, they cheered him loudly when he had finished.

Then came a song by big Hans Thorson, a great fair man with long, drooping moustache, whose appearance always reminded me of the old Vikings, from whom, no doubt, he had sprung. He sang in a fine, free voice, a song that took the place by storm, and was the most popular song in the forest for many a day afterwards. The tune is with me always, and one line of the song is running through my mind even as I write. It is this—

"The bells were ringing the old year out, and the new year in."

After Hans had given the inevitable encore, there appeared on the platform a stranger from Melbourne, a visitor at "Woodlands." He was an asthmatic-looking little man, dressed most elaborately, and although not big in body he was evidently great in the spirit, and possessed unlimited confidence in himself. M'Candlish, with something of a twitch about his mouth, announced that Mr. Dorking would sing "The Gladiator," and Mr. Dorking bowed profoundly, and smiled familiarly after the manner of popular favourites, and then in an ominous silence, for somehow we bush people dislike and resent familiarity, he began in a small, high-pitched, piping voice to sing—

"The gladiator am I, the whole wide world I defy."

There was very good attention until the middle of the second verse, then the contrast between the little man with the quavering voice and the physical giant he was representing, became plain even to the dullest wits, and seemed unspeakably comical and absurd. But the average bushman is a born gentleman in things of this kind, and even the young men battled nobly with their feelings, until a brawny young splitter half-way down the hall, whose nerves were highly strung—owing, no doubt, to

the fact that he was sitting for the first time in public by the side of his "Donah," as he styled his young lady—was suddenly overcome, and bowing his head he broke out with the proverbial "Oh cripes!" and instantly the pent-up merriment burst forth on all sides; even grave men like Allan M'Nair gave way, slapped their legs, and laughed uproariously.

The superior man stopped in his song, and gazed upon the scene before him in unspeakable amazement, then when its meaning dawned upon him, deep disgust took possession of his soul, and in a hurricane of cheering, stamping, and whistling, he left the platform and went straight home, having learnt by bitter experience what many Townies seem unable to learn in any other way, that bush people are not all fools and children.

There were two or three songs and recitations after that, but the time would fail me to describe them; when they were over M'Candlish stood up and said that we had now come to "the dry part of the programme"—he was to speak to us for a little while; and unlike most preachers, when M'Candlish said a "little while" he meant it. So he said his say, and without wearying anybody, contrived to get home some very plain truths.

I asked M'Candlish one day how he had managed to learn the art of brevity so well, and why it was he carried it out so rigorously; and he told me that when he first began to preach, he had had a conversation with an old Welshman, whose brother was a Dean in the Church of England, and a very popular preacher. And he said that, in the course of conversation, he had asked this gentleman what was the secret of his brother's success, and he had replied, "He knows when to knock off, Mr. M'Candlish; he knows when to knock off." "And," said M'Candlish, "I reckon that's the great secret—to know when to knock off." And I'm perfectly sure that many a long-suffering hearer will wish as devoutly as I do, that a great many more of our preachers and public speakers would, like M'Candlish, lay themselves out to learn and practise that art.

The people heard the parson through to the end; and then while the collection was being taken up, various ones arose mysteriously from among the audience, and with the air of Italian conspirators, made their way to the back of the stage to dress for the dialogue. Some one, I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten who, sang a song, but it was scarcely listened

to, because all were eager for the dialogue which was to follow.

Presently the curtain went up, and a number of young people, ludicrously dressed, stampeded through a very third-rate dialogue, in which the usual cook and policeman played a prominent part. But, whatever the merits or demerits of this piece were, it was certainly the event of the evening, and fairly brought down the house, sending the people away in high spirits, this being the end of the programme; for after we had sung a hymn, M'Candlish pronounced the Benediction, and we went out into the glorious moonlight, some to go home, others to get a mouthful of fresh air—or something else—and to return later on to the dance.

When I got out M'Candlish was busy shaking hands with all and sundry. Mothers were pinning up their skirts, and herding their half-dazed children up into little flocks, and giving them instructions, thus—

“Teddy, you button up your coat round your neck, an’ keep out er the mud.”

“Lizzie, do you hear your mother talkin’ to yer? Tie that scarf under your chin.”

“Sammy, you take ’old ov your little sister by the ’and.” “Mary Jane, you tie your shawl

over your mouth ; it's not good fer yer ter come out inter the frosty air after you've been singin'."

Then from all quarters came cries of "Good-night !" "Good-night, Airchie" ; "Good-night, Annie" ; "So long, Dan" ; "Hooray, Bill" ; "W'en are yer comin' over our way, Jim ?" ; "Good-night, Jess" ; "Ain't yer goin' ter stay for the dance ?" ; "See yer Sunday, Hector" ; "Be good, Ted" ; "Good-night" ; "Good-night" ; "Good-night."

And so having had a break in the usual course of our lives, although in a very homely fashion, we returned to our homes with renewed energies to continue our battle with the scrub and bush.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE WAY HOME

AS I said good-night to the men with whom I had been talking, I heard the parson shouting lustily, "Who's coming my way?" and I was pleased to see that most of the young people who lived in our direction responded to the call and went with him. As for me, I hung back in the shadows and followed the crowd afar off, that I might be able to enjoy to the full the sweetness of the night.

The moon was higher now, and shone with such a radiant glory that all the stars were paled to insignificance before her. The shadows, too, were deeper, though not so long drawn out. The air was crisper, and in places Jack Frost was hard at work on the surface of the ground, which crunched and crackled beneath the feet. Without a

doubt I was in the proper mood just then to feel the charm of all nature, but in any case it was a night to make a man feel young, a night that rolled back the horizon that had crept nearer with the years, and waked once more—

“The glad pulsation that I felt before the strife,
When I heard my days before me, and the tumult
of my life.”

Crisply and clearly through the frosty air came the distant “Good-nights” of the people ahead as they turned off to their homes at the partings of the way; and my spirit was leaping within me and a great rapture glowed in my heart as I swung down the hill towards the creek where you branch off when you are going to Stirlings’ farm. You may see their house in the paddock, a little distance back from the road.

The track down which I came was in dense shadow, but where the roads divide there is a little clearing, and as I came towards it I was surprised to see two persons standing there in the bright moonlight; and I was a great deal more surprised when, on approaching nearer, I made them out to be the parson and pretty Jinny Stirling.

My astonishment was so great that I came to a full stop on the brink of the shadows, and remained there simply because I did not know what else to do.

I did not wish to go back, I could not go forward, and while I was hesitating as to what I should do, I became the unwilling listener to their conversation. It was Jinny who broke the silence that had fallen upon them.

"I'm afraid, Mr. M'Candlish, it's no use ;" she said, "I've tried again and again, and the more I try the worse I seem to get ; I've got the desire to be a Christian, but somehow I don't seem to have the power."

After a little M'Candlish replied slowly and gently—

"I sympathise with you with all my heart, and I think I understand the difficulty ; but I know with absolute certainty that there is power, not with you, of course, but there is power with God ; and if you are willing you may find it, and when you do, you will find also that all your desires after God will become accomplished facts. If I tell you," he went on, "how you may find that power, will you seek it ?"

Jinny hesitated, then she said timidly—

"I'm afraid it's of no use, Mr. M'Candlish,

but if you really think you can put me on the right way, I will try again."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Well, listen to me, and as surely as God reigns in heaven and is true to His promises, if you do as I tell you you will find the power you long for. When you get home go straight to your room, and have the matter out with God; get down on your knees before Him, and give yourself unreservedly to Him, body and soul; then ask Him to forgive you and cleanse you from all the past and make you a Christian. And if you are in earnest, He will do it. He can't help doing it. And before you are an hour older you will experience the power you long for, and get the assurance that it's all right."

Jinny's eyes had been fixed steadfastly on the ground all the time M'Candlish had been speaking, but when he had finished she raised them to his face, and said—

"Very well, Mr. M'Candlish, I'll do what you say."

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night. You'll pray for me, won't you?" she said, extending her hand to say goodbye.

"You may be sure I will," he answered eagerly. "Good-night, Miss Jinny ; God bless you."

"Good-night, Mr. M'Candlish, and thank you."

The parson stood watching her until she disappeared through the garden gate ; then he walked along the track to where a great tree lay, and halting there and baring his head, he looked up to heaven and prayed aloud with intense earnestness for the soul of Jinny Stirling.

And over on the opposite hillside a lonely mopoke called to his mate, and in the valley beneath the creek sang on its way to the sea ; while high over all the full moon hung like a great white lamp in a dome of spangled blue.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DANCE AND FIGHT AT TIMBOON

THE Band of Hope audience had scarcely got outside the hall before a number of young men, with Mr. Bill M'Guire, Master of the Ceremonies, at their head, began clearing the place for the dance. First of all the forms were pushed back to the wall or carried right out into the yard ; then the Master of the Ceremonies drew from his pocket the larger half of a sperm candle, and, opening a murderous-looking pocket-knife, proceeded to scrape the candle all over the floor. Having accomplished this piece of work to his satisfaction, he then went to the front door and shouted to the group of men, who had seized the opportunity for a smoke—

“Pipes out, blokes ; we’ve got ’er cleared up an’ greased, an’ the girls are waitin’.”

This was scarcely true, as all the girls were

packed into the ante-room, removing their hats, prinking up their hair, and exchanging their boots for dancing shoes, such as had them. However, he was not far wrong, for as the men jostled one another in at the front door and filled up the seats on one side of the hall, the girls came trooping down from the stage and sat along the opposite side.

Hardly had they got seated when in came Harry Peden with his accordion under his arm. Harry was a person of great distinction in the forest, inasmuch as he was the only man who could play dance music, and consequently his services were in great demand.

Like all musicians, Harry was an eccentric in dress and manner, and also an autocrat of the most pronounced character. His long, gaunt figure was clad in a tweed overcoat that reached down to his feet; around his neck he wore a great red and white woollen muffler, and on his head an old grey felt hat pulled down over his ears. He was never known to go to a dance in any costume other than this, and what was more, he was never known to remove any part of it the whole night through.

Harry strode through the hall without deigning to notice anybody, and, mounting

the platform, sat down on the chair provided for him; pulling his hat still further down over his eyes, he crossed one leg over the other and rested the accordion on his knee; and then, after a few preliminary flourishes, executed with the greatest ease and indifference, he struck up the Highland Schottische.

This was the signal to Mr. M'Guire, M.C., that they were to begin the evening's dancing with the schottische, for amongst other things Harry firmly held that the man who played the music had a right to say what music he would play, so that nobody ever knew what the next dance was to be. If Harry played a waltz, they waltzed; if a polka, they polkaed; if a barn dance, they danced that; but any set programme was quite out of the question.

And there was another thing. Harry regarded it as a personal affront if the M.C., or anybody else, came asking what he intended playing next. "You arsk no questions, an' you'll 'ear no lies," he exclaimed on one memorable occasion when Mr. M'Guire had delicately broached the subject, and added in withering tones, "You make me tired! Isn't it enough fer me ter sit 'ere all the bloomin' night, arf perished with cold, an' playin' till me arms ache, without bein' critercised by people that

don't know one chune from another? If yer don't like my style, git somebody else, that's all."

The Master of Ceremonies did not like Harry's style, not in the least degree; but as there was nobody else to get he very wisely refrained from saying so; and Harry having delivered his soul, and defined his position, set to and played with great unction that classic composition known as the "Honeysuckle and the Bee." From that time Harry ruled them with a rod of iron, and, being entirely at his mercy, the dancers diplomatically pocketed their pride and made the best of things.

"Now then," shouted the Master of the Ceremonies, hurrying into the centre of the hall, directly Harry had finished the first bars of the schottische, "Now then, blokes, s'lect your partners fer the Highlan' Shottish."

Had a foreigner unacquainted with the language been present, he might have supposed the men who lined the seats by the wall to have been a company of irregular soldiers, and the M.C. their captain giving them the order to charge, for directly his words were spoken the whole line sprang to their feet and made a wild rush for the girls on the opposite side, for the rule was "first come,

first served." There was a general *mêlée* for about the space of a minute, then one young fellow after another emerged from the mass, dragging a blushing partner with him, whom he led triumphantly round the hall.

This method of selecting partners has at least this advantage, that a man generally receives the reward of his energy; the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong; but it has this disadvantage, that if two young men are intent upon dancing with the same young lady, and they are well matched as regards speed and strength, there is likely to be trouble.

It happened that Dick the Dasher and Alf Jenkins had both set their hearts upon having the first dance with Miss Jemima White, a young lady whose bonny face and ready wit made her a great favourite with the boys, and when the signal was given both sped across the hall from different quarters, and so great was their eagerness that, as they reached their destination and sought to stop themselves, they slipped on the newly greased floor, their feet shot from under them, and they sat down suddenly and hard.

Dick was the first to struggle to his feet, so he carried off the prize. Alf was rather

nettled, but, hurriedly recovering himself, he made a dive for another partner, a girl with a very pasty complexion and wearing a pink dress.

"Goin' ter git up?" he asked eagerly.

"No," she replied shortly, "I'm not!"

This second disappointment was too much for Alf's temper. Casting upon her a look of great contempt, he said—

"Well, sit down, then!" and marching back to the other side of the hall he sat savagely nursing his wrath.

A loud, peremptory blast on the accordion was Harry's signal that it was time to begin, and as Harry, like time and tide, waited for no man, or woman either, every couple was quickly in position. Then the music struck up and away they went with flying feet, up the hall, and down the hall, and across the hall, till the place was shaken to its foundations with their trampings.

There were loud whoops and heavy stamps with the feet from the men, when the time and music seemed to demand them, and there were nervous shrieks from the girls when two couples, careering in opposite directions, came violently into collision, or when some one particularly energetic trod on his partner's toes, or slipped and fell down on the greasy floor.

Never was such dancing, never was such fun got out of dancing, never was such energy put into it. The dance that Tam O'Shanter saw through the windows of "Alloways auld haunted Kirk" was nothing to it; but unfortunately, like that world-famous one, it was destined to come to a very abrupt termination.

Alf Jenkins sat on a form by the wall feeling angry and disappointed, and the high spirits of the others only added fuel to the fire of his wrath. Presently full tilt down the hall came pretty Jemima and Dick the Dasher; it was evident that they were enjoying themselves, for their faces were very close together, and Dick was plainly making some remarks that gave great pleasure to Miss Jemima, if one could judge by the expression of her face.

This was altogether too much for Alf's nerves. A tide of jealousy and devilment swept over him, and as Dick and Jemima went by he suddenly shot out his foot, they tripped over it and had all they could do to retain their balance and save themselves from falling.

Dick was disposed to think it an accident, but looking back he saw that in the face of Alf which made him change his mind. How-

ever, he said nothing to his partner, but took care to come near enough in the next round to give Alf an opportunity to repeat the insult if he dared ; and Alf saw the challenge, and dared, with the result that both Dick and Jemima went sprawling on the floor.

This was sufficient, and more than sufficient, to wake the spirit of battle in the heart of the Dasher. His eyes blazed with anger, and hastily picking himself up, he strode towards Alf, and glaring into his face, in a voice that brought every dancer in the room to a standstill, he shouted—

“Did you do that on purpose?”

Alf rose to his feet as Dick approached him, and in the coolest tones imaginable he replied—

“Did I do what?”

“Did you trip me up on purpose?”

“No, I tripped you up on the floor.”

“Then take that!” and Dick’s fist shot out like lightning, and Alf staggered back against the wall, bleeding from a cut over the eye ; but he pulled himself together instantly, and shouting, “You cowardly brute!” he rushed upon Dick. They closed at once, and locked together, fighting desperately, crashed down on the floor.

CHAPTER XVI

HARRY PEDEN'S ACCOUNT OF THE FIGHT

THE day following the events described in the last chapter, Harry Peden, Musician-in-Chief to the whole forest, came over to our place for the purpose of borrowing some plough harness, and we were all somewhat startled at the appearance he presented. His right cheek was patched up and held together by an enormous quantity of sticking plaster, his nose, minus the greater part of its skin, was red and swollen, while his left eye had gone into very deep mourning.

At that time we had no knowledge of what had occurred at Timboon the previous night, and were naturally very curious to know how Harry had come by his injuries. In response to our inquiries he told us what I have already set down, and then continued—

“I was playin’ away with me eyes shut, just

as I alwus do, w'en all ov a sudden I 'eard a yell that nearly curdled me blood, an' w'en I looked round there wos Alf Jenkins and Dick the Dasher down on the floor, scrappin' away like two Tom cats, Dick underneath. Then the girls begun to yell, an' sing out at the top of their voices, 'They're killin' one another!' 'Pull 'em off! pull 'em off!' 'Take 'em away!' an' a lot ov other things; an' young Alex Black 'e run an collared Alf by the shoulders, tryin' to get 'em apart; but Jim Jenkins 'e thought Alex wos 'elpin' Dick, an' ov course 'e couldn't stand seein' two ov 'em on to 'ees brother, so 'e sailed in like a chicken inter mud, an' bashed Alex over the jaw an' knocked 'im under the seat; then Sandy Black lammed inter Jim, an' then somebody else took a hand, an' before any one knew wot 'ad 'appened, the whole bloomin' crowd wos mixed up together fightin' like mad. You oughter been there; I never see anythink like it, my word!"

"And what about the women? They didn't join in the fight?"

"No, ov course not; but you should a'seen them, you'd 'ave took a fit. Some ov 'em cleared out as 'ard as they could go, an' some fainted; one went inter histerricks, an' yelled an' 'ammered the floor with 'er 'eels. Mary Ann

Hall, she was sittin' up in a corner, pullin' 'er 'air, and screechin' out at the top ov 'er voice. Some of 'em was tryin' ter git the chaps ter knock off fightin', but they might as well 'ave tried ter stop a train."

"But how did you come to be in it?"

"Me? It wos the rummiest thing out. I wos standin' up on the platform takin' it all in, w'en all ov a sudden a funny sort ov a feelin' come over me, like as if I wanted ter laugh or cry, or somethin'; a terrible 'appy sort ov feelin', an' then I began. I didn't mean ter go in, an' I didn't want ter go in, but some'ow w'en that feelin' come over me, I couldn't 'elp meself. I just pulled me 'at off an' flung it on the floor; then I let out a yell, an' swung the accordion round me 'ed by the strap.

"Before I came to that dance I wouldn't 'ave took a five-pound note for that accordion, but I must 'ave gone clean off me rocker, for I whirled it round me 'ed and slung it inter the middle ov the fight, just as if it 'ad been a dead 'possum. It 'it Terrible Billy right on the ear, an' nearly laid 'im out, an' the worst ov it wos that Billy saw me do it, though 'e hadn't time ter git out ov the road.

"Billy wos 'avin' a go at Pete M'Cabe at the time, but w'en he saw me sling the accordion,

'e let Pete off, an' as soon as 'e 'ad pulled 'imself together a bit, 'e come at me, an' some'ow although we was alwus the best of friends, I felt glad ter see 'im comin', an' jumped down off the platform an' went ter meet 'im. Then we begun ter spar round fer an openin', an' some'ow I backed inter the crowd, an' somebody gimme a wipe over the jaw from behind, an' the next thing I knew, I was in the thick ov the battle enjoyin' meself, my word !

"Tommy Boldner was 'avin' a lovely time—it was right into 'ees 'ands ; 'e knocked out about six chaps, I think, an' was lookin' fer more, w'en somebody got 'old ov my accordion an' smashed 'im over the 'ed with it, an' settled 'im up fer a bit. We might 'ave been there yet," Billy continued, smacking his lips, "only w'en the fight started, Jemima White, she tore off outer the hall an' down ter the store, yellin' at the top ov 'er voice, an' it appears that Big Hans Thorson an' Long Jack Smith were there 'avin' supper with the Williams's, an' they come tearin' up an' then——"

"Well ?"

"Well, you know wot they are : one ov 'em would be a contract fer two or three Sandows ; but w'en the two ov 'em got goin'—well, us

ordinary men 'ad no charnst ; besides, we wos pretty well all knocked out as it wos, so they just come right inter the middle ov it, an' busted the fight up.

"Hans, he roared at us like a wild bull, an' called us all the names 'e could lay 'ees tongue to. Long Jack didn't say much, but 'e slung us about somethink crool ; an' after a while, w'en we 'ad cooled down a bit, we began ter wonder wot it wos all about ; so we shook 'ands all round, an' me an' Terrible Billy double banked 'ees 'orse, an' rode 'ome together the best ov friends."

"And so that was how it came about, was it ?"

"Yas, that was the way of it."

"But what about Dick and Alf, did they shake hands ?"

"Wal, no, I carn't say as they did ; they're goin' ter settle their affair next Sunday after church. S'pose you'll be there, Mr. M'Candlish ?" Harry added, looking gravely at the parson, who had been leaning against a verandah post, listening sadly to this tale of woe.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I'll be there." And he was.

CHAPTER XIX

DICK THE DASHER SEEKS A PICKER-UP

THE average Colonial is a difficult man to surprise. For some strange reason he believes it to be unmanly and unbecoming to allow anything to disturb or excite him. His ideal is to be philosophically calm and indifferent under all circumstances.

Robert M'Candlish had practised this art until it had become second nature to him, and it required something very startling indeed to penetrate his mask of studied calm, but there came a night in his life when he was astonished, and looked it ; and that was the night following the visit of the forest musician to our farm.

After tea, as M'Candlish was about to go into his room, Dick the Dasher called him outside, saying that he had something to ask him.

"Harry told you all about the fight, didn't he?" Dick asked, when they had got some little distance away from the house.

"Yes, he did," the parson replied, wondering what was in the Dasher's mind.

"Well, me an' Alf's goin' ter settle it next Sunday afternoon wen church comes out, an' I wos wonderin' if you'd mind comin' inter the scrub after the service is over an' pickin' me up."

For a full half-minute M'Candlish was so taken aback by this cool request that he doubted whether he had heard aright; but when Dick had repeated his words, and their true significance became clear to him, his face grew purple with rage, and there came over him a change so terrible, that Dick the Dasher involuntarily shrank back in fear, feeling like a boy who has set fire to a haystack, and is terrified when he sees what he has done.

The parson was so overcome by passion that for a moment he was unable to move; then he took a stride forward, and, grasping Dick by the shoulders, he shook him till his teeth rattled in his head.

"What?" he roared, towering over the hapless Dick—"what, do you mean to say you've got the cheek to come asking me to

pick you up? You—you beast, you!—I don't know what else to call you."

For a time his rage so choked him that he was unable to speak; then he broke forth again—

"Pick you up on Sunday? I've a good mind to knock you down, and do it so thoroughly that you'll stay down for many a Sunday, and for two pins I would." And for a moment it seemed as though he might, but evidently he thought better of it, and, hurling Dick from him, he mastered his passion and his face assumed its old expression; but his voice was hard, and every word he said cut into Dick like a stock whip as he went on: "I'll tell you what it is, Master Dick the Dasher, I'm not going to desecrate God's holy day—not for you, nor any other man under heaven—and what's more, you're not going to do it either. This fight will be settled Sunday, sure enough; but I'll settle it, not you. And when I've done with it it will be settled, you may be sure of that. And there's another thing, if I catch you on the far side of Curdie's River next Sunday afternoon, upon any pretence whatever, I'll break every bone in your body. Now, don't make any mistake about what I say, or you'll be sorry afterwards, for

I've a rather nasty way of keeping my promises."

Having said this, the parson strolled quietly inside, leaving Dick the Dasher on the sharp horns of a great dilemma. On the one side there was the absolute certainty of everlasting disgrace and dishonour if he failed to meet Alf on Sunday, and on the other there was the equal certainty of being half killed by the parson if he did. Dick was sorely puzzled, and the only ray of hope that came to him was in the reflection that possibly M'Candlish might go and have an interview with Alf; and if it were at all of the same nature as the one he had had with himself, Dick did not in any way fear the result; and in this thought he found some slight comfort.

CHAPTER XX

HOW THE PARSON SETTLED THE FIGHT

THE Church services at Timboon were held in the public hall ; and when M'Candlish first came to the district seven people was an average congregation—and fourteen signified an anniversary, or something very special.

However, when M'Candlish got to work things rapidly improved ; but never before, even in his time, was such a congregation seen in the hall as that which thronged it the Sunday afternoon following the fight. It was made up principally of men, and it was evident at a glance that they had come, not to worship God, but to see the fight when the service was done.

There was a striking absence of Sunday clothes, nearly every man present was wearing his native moleskins and coloured shirt ; for,

remembering what had recently happened, they had come prepared not only to see a fight, but to take part in one if necessary ; and having no desire to get their best clothes ruined, they had prudently left them at home.

Alf Jenkins was there, sitting in the midst of his admirers, looking sullen and defiant. Tommy Boldner was there, with blood in his eye, so to speak, having made up his mind to avenge himself upon his kind for the blow he got on his head with Harry's accordion. Harry himself was there, with a complexion that was something between a brown and a green. Terrible Billy was there, with the marks of the accordion still fresh upon the side of his head. Big Hans was there, Long Jack, Stringy Bark Paterson, Bill M'Guire, the Blacks, Stirlings, and a host of others ; with the exception of Dick the Dasher they were all there, and the atmosphere was electric.

The parson was wonderfully calm and collected considering the nature of the circumstances ; for his position was that of a man examining a powder magazine with a lighted torch.

His sermon was based upon the twenty-fourth verse of the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew's Gospel—" The Son of man indeed goeth as it is

written of Him, but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed." In the beginning he told us that the passage was greatly misunderstood ; there was no threat in the words, as most people supposed, there was only pity and sorrow, for the word translated "woe" would have been better translated "alas." It was not the "Son of man indeed goeth to His enemies and His cross, but God help the man who is sending Him there." It was rather "the Son of man indeed goeth, and hard will it be for Him going down the rough, lonely way of the cross, but it will not be nearly so hard as the way of the poor wretch who is sending Him there. Alas for that man ! Alas for Judas !"

His chief point was that Christ had more pity for His betrayer than for Himself ; that He regarded it as better to be betrayed than to betray ; to be injured than to injure ; to be sold than to sell ; to be struck rather than to strike.

The sermon was evidently prepared in view of the fight, and was wonderfully powerful and eloquent. And sitting there one could not but feel how petty and mean were our ways of avenging our wrongs upon those who had injured us compared with Christ's attitude towards the

man who had injured Him. . However, I'm afraid the seed that day fell mostly upon stony ground, for there are none so deaf as those who do not wish to hear.

We did not get the usual benediction at the close of the service, for when the last hymn was sung the parson, standing with closed eyes, stretched forth his hands and said—

“ May the peace ”—and the word “ peace ” was strongly emphasised—“ may the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.”

As soon as the service was over the crowd disappeared into the scrub, expecting to meet with Dick the Dasher at the appointed place ; yet it must be admitted that they went in a shamefaced manner, reminding one of a number of boys caught in the act of doing wrong.

When M'Candlish came out of the hall there was not a man in sight, and such of the women as stood about looked pale and anxious. The parson's face was hard and set as he inquired the way the men had taken ; and when it was pointed out to him he sprang upon Tommy, and driving the spurs into his flanks galloped off in pursuit.

He was not long in overtaking them, and

came thundering into their midst as they trooped along a wide and slushy track. They scattered in all directions with loud shouts of protest as the mud and dirty water from Tommy's hoofs went flying over them ; but, disregarding all save Alf, the parson made for him, and dragging Tommy up on to his haunches just when he seemed about to ride Alf down, he cried—

“Alf, are you willing to squash this tomfoolery if Dick is ?”

Alf thought a moment with his eyes cast down, then he replied slowly, “Well, yes.”

“That's right, Alf, then you may consider it settled, for I've got Dick fixed up all right. Shake hands.”

Alf extended his hand, and the parson gave him a grip that brought the tears to his eyes.

Then M'Candlish turned in the saddle and faced the crowd, who were looking on at this unexpected turn of affairs with rather disappointed faces.

“I hardly know what to say to you,” he began, “especially you older men and married men ; I'm just sick to think that you would come out here on God's holy day to gloat over a thing like this ; and if you're not ashamed of yourselves you ought to be.”

He paused awhile, then his temper seemed to get the better of him, and pulling his horse round he faced them fairly, and went on—

“You want fight, do you? My own opinion of most of you is that you would rather see others fight than take it on yourselves.”

He waited a little space then, as though he expected a reply, but as none was forthcoming he went on again—

“I’m not a fighting man—it’s not my trade ; but I’ll tell you what it is : if I thought a real good hiding would do any man in this crowd a particle of good, I wouldn’t trouble Peter Jackson¹ to give it to him.”

This extraordinary and unparsonlike speech so staggered the crowd that the challenge brought forth no response save open-eyed wonderment ; and after waiting a moment, and looking sarcastically round, M’Candlish continued—

“To think that you men would come straight from the worship of God, and with the benediction of the God of peace ringing in your ears, to take part in a beastly, miserable thing like this, it’s simply—damnable !” And without another word the parson rode slowly away and disappeared amongst the trees.

¹ Champion pugilist of world.

For some time after he had gone the men stared at one another in profound astonishment, doubting if they had heard aright. At length the spell was broken by Terrible Billy, and what he said was this—

“Well, you wouldn’t take my advice, an’ now you’ve done it.”

“You never give us any advice that I ever ’eard of ; leastwise any that wos worth ’avin’, but wot ’ave we done?” It was Long Jack who spoke.

“You’ve made the parson swear.”

“Well,” Long Jack replied, “wasn’t it enough ter make ’im ? ”

“Well it wos, w’en yer come ter think ov it ; an’ after all,” Terrible Billy continued, assuming an air of profound wisdom, and speaking professionally—“after all, it’s just as I’ve alwus said, men are like bullicks, an’ you carnt do anythink with ’em one way or another, unless you swear at ’em.”

“I don’t know about that,” Long Jack replied, “I ain’t wot you would call a w’ite-robed angel meself ; but I think there’s a blame sight too much swearin’ amongst bullickies—an’ other men too, fer the matter ov that ; we’d get along a darned sight better without it ; but I think that Mr. M’Candlish said about the only thing

that he could say under the circumstances ; an' some'ow it seemed ter do me more good than 'ees sermon."

And strangely enough that was the general feeling.

CHAPTER XXI

A RELIGIOUS CONUNDRUM

THREE months passed away, and they were months of progress in all the Churches in the district. Everywhere things were moving up, and, under God, to M'Candlish alone was the credit due for this welcome change. His sermons were the talk of the whole countryside; people crowded to hear him from all parts of the forest, and amongst them many who had never previously shown the slightest inclination to go to the house of God. Old Ulysses astonished everybody by breaking his twenty years' record and coming one day to a service at Timboon. Outside the church, when the service was over, he was greeted with a great deal of chaff; but he saved the situation for himself by saying that he had come in the hope of hearing the parson swear again. But it was only his fun, and, the ice

having been broken, there was no more regular and interested attendant. And he was only one of the many, both old and young, until Bill M'Guire complained bitterly that they were all getting so religious, and so much taken up with going to church, that it was impossible to get up a dance. Whether he was right or wrong I cannot say, but it was very certain that before the winter was over a deep spiritual change was making itself manifest in all the Churches.

Many men, most men of parts, loom largely in your eyes at first sight and become diminishing quantities as you continue to look upon them: the longer you know them the smaller they appear. Other men there are whom you scarcely notice when first you see them, they seem almost small and insignificant, but as time goes on they grow upon you, and continue doing so, until they fill your heaven and earth, and like the priest of God who blessed Abraham, they seem without beginning and without end.

To the latter class belonged M'Candlish. He grew upon me from the beginning, until from thinking him ordinary and commonplace I came to regard him as the most extraordinary character I had ever known ; and that

feeling I retain to this day. I have met with cleverer, wiser, more scholarly, better men, but a more interesting man, never.

He was just one great succession of surprises, and the day he left us to return no more I found myself in precisely the same position with regard to him that I was in the first night he came to our house. I was profoundly interested, and quite unable to measure his abilities or fathom his mind.

A great many extremes seemed to meet in him, with the result that he was a kind of paradox; one thing, and yet not that, but something entirely different. Ralph Emerson says somewhere that "To be great is to be misunderstood;" and if it were also true that not to be understood is to be great, then M'Candlish might have ranked as one of the great ones of the earth; for nobody ever understood him in the least degree.

No one ever seemed able to guess what he could do, or what he would do; and consequently we were always expecting that he would—to quote Dick the Dasher—"break out in a fresh place," and we were never disappointed.

It has seemed to me that when once you have sounded the depths in a man's character, and

know precisely what he is and what he can do, he ceases to interest you ; but so long as you are conscious of unfathomed and uncertain deeps within him your interest continues. It was thus M'Candlish maintained our interest and kept us in a continual simmer of expectation.

That he could be as gentle as a mother we had all experienced ; and that he could be as rough as a sea-captain was never doubted from the day that he settled the fight at Timboon. That he was in deadly earnest about his work everybody most implicitly believed, and he was revered accordingly, but on the other hand it was a recognised fact that amongst all the forest boys there was not one more utterly reckless and wild.

He would preach with a passion and eloquence that would hold people spellbound, and he would ride through the forest at such a pace, and send Tommy over such obstacles, that even Dick the Dasher trembled to follow him, and returning home one day from some mad escapade he said, as he let his horse go, " If that bally parson don't git outer this forest soon, 'ee'll break 'ees bloomin' neck—or mine."

I think that in all probability no man ever did better pastoral work in a more unorthodox fashion. Mounted on Tommy, decked out in

that outrageous riding kit, and having his heels armed with a pair of long-necked spurs, and his legs encased in riding leggings, he would either moon along the tracks at a snail's pace, wrapped in profound thought, or else he would fly along like one possessed, the reins in one hand and, if the day were fine, his hat in the other ; and at such times you might hear him half a mile away, singing at the top of his voice.

He would ride up to a farm at full gallop, pigs, fowls, and geese flying before him, the dogs raging, and the whole place in a ferment. Tying Tommy up and flinging his overcoat across his hind-quarters to keep him from catching cold, M'Candlish would stalk gravely into the house, and whatsoever his hands found to do he did it with his might.

Nothing seemed to come amiss to him in the extraordinary conditions in which he often found himself ; he was equally at home sweeping the floor, minding a baby, or digging the potatoes for dinner ; and the beauty of it was, that he seemed quite unconscious that he was doing anything unusual, or had got off the beaten track at all.

When young Jack Seeley got sick, and his wife—between Jack and the baby—was half distracted, M'Candlish, hearing of the trouble,

rode over to see if he could do anything to help them. Mrs. Jack told it through the forest herself that he marched the baby up and down until it went to sleep, then washed up all the dishes he could find, swept the house out, milked the cow, dug up a bag of potatoes, and finally cut up sufficient wood to last them for a week.

Nor was this the whole extent of his ministrations, for he would inquire as to the welfare of the souls of his flock as particularly as any doctor might into that of their bodies, and he would reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine, according to the nature of the case. This done he would bring a Revised Version of the Bible out of his pocket and read to them, generally from the Psalms, and then kneeling down, pray with the unction of a saint, and finally go away as he came—like a whirlwind—amid a pandemonium of barking dogs and shrieking poultry.

One day he would spend in Mrs. Ross's drawing-room, playing the piano and singing as only he could ; or taking tea from dainty china cups at a tiny table on the balcony, discussing meanwhile with that clever lady the merits and demerits of some new book.

The day following would probably find him

away at the other end of the district on Archie Mathieson's "block," helping Archie to fell trees on the fence line, while they hotly debated some theological problem ; for Archie was a great thinker, and dearly loved an argument on a religious topic.

That night would in all probability be spent at Mathieson's ; the neighbours would drop in, hymn-books would be brought out, and a great "sing-song" take place, M'Candlish teaching the folk anything new he may have picked up in his wanderings, and they doing the same for him.

The next day he would visit all the houses in the neighbourhood, reading and praying with those who happened to be at home, and the following morning he would be on his way back to Brucknell, deliberately going off the track for the purpose of jumping Tommy over logs.

CHAPTER XXII

EXTREMES OF LEARNING

TOMMY BOLDNER, the blacksmith, was the only man in our immediate neighbourhood who kept a racehorse ; and I remember very vividly a day when M'Candlish sat on the anvil in the shop arguing with Tommy as to the possibility of a poor man making money by horse racing. Tommy thought it was possible—why else did he keep a horse ? The parson maintained that it was not ; and argued with a knowledge of the details of racing that fairly staggered me, and quite evidently the blacksmith too.

The points he made were something like this :—

1. It does not pay to race a horse unless you back him. To this the blacksmith agreed.

2. But a poor man with little money at his command can't make anything by backing a

horse unless he gets very long odds. To this also the blacksmith agreed.

3. To get long odds about your horse you must run him stiff a time or two, to convince the public that he is no good, which costs more money than a poor man can afford. This Tommy would not admit, though he could not deny it.

4. Finally, the day you've got your money on your horse and want him to win, it's a hundred to one that something happens and he goes down.

That this was logic the blacksmith knew by bitter experience, but like many another man who follows racing, his belief in logic was less strong than his belief in luck, so he went on in the way he had chosen, and continued to live in poverty, in order that he might keep a horse in luxury.

That evening old Mr. Beckett, the best of our lay preachers and the one man of science that the forest could boast, happened to drop in after tea. He was greatly excited over some skeletons of prehistoric men discovered in a cave called Cro-Magnon, somewhere in the South of France, about which he had only just read in a review. But recent as the article was, the parson seemed to know all about the

matter, and he and Mr. Beckett had a great discussion about the probable effect of the discovery upon the Genesis story.

M'Candlish was of opinion that the immense size of the "old man of Cro-Magnon" bore out the Bible saying that "there were giants in those days"; while the fact that none of his teeth were missing, but all of them were worn down to the gums with long service, indicated that he had lived to a much greater age than men live in these times, which was also a confirmation of the Genesis story, though he said he was not a stickler for a too literal reading of Genesis.

How much truth there was in the parson's reasoning I was not able to judge, for at that time I knew nothing whatever about the matter, but Mr. Beckett, who had made a life study of these things, seemed to think that M'Candlish's conclusions were not improbable, and the following Sunday treated us to a remarkable sermon on the subject.

I mention these incidents not because they were in any way unusual or out of the ordinary, but because occurring as they did on the same day, they afford a partial illustration of the strange diversity of the new parson's knowledge and attainments. He seemed equally at home

discussing horse racing or prehistoric man, just as he was when doctoring a sick cow or expounding the types of the Old Testament ; and, so far as I can remember, during all the time he remained in our house I never knew a subject to crop up with which he was not familiar.

How or by what means M'Candlish got the wide general learning he undoubtedly possessed was more than I could imagine. He was no student—that is to say, he had no settled habits of study. It is true he read ravenously, but always in a most desultory fashion, a method not calculated, it seemed to me, to give him a permanent grip of anything.

His favourite books, if one were to judge by those seen most frequently in his hands, were the Bible, which he was always brooding over, and of which he had a wonderful knowledge, Emerson's "Essays," Pepys' "Diary," Walton's "Lives," "Alice in Wonderland," "Treasure Island" and "The Wrecker" (he worshipped Stevenson), Kingsley's "Heroes," "The Odyssey," "Iliad," Tennyson, "Pickwick," and Charles Reade's "Cloister and the Hearth."

Theology he declared he "hated with a perfect hatred," and I believe he did. Of

Evidences he said he "had no use for them"; and as for the works of the higher critics, he declared that most of those he had read made him "tired," so much was built upon so little that they reminded him of a pyramid heavy end up, and added that for all practical purposes they were the most unprofitable books a preacher could read; there wasn't "one helpful sermon in a dozen of them."

He had studied the languages somewhat, but of his attainments in that direction I can only give a guess to this day. When I inquired as to how far he had got along, he replied that he "knew as much about Latin, Greek, and Hebrew as a New Chum Chinaman knows about English," and added that this was true of nine out of every ten men two years after they had finished their theological course. What he said may have been perfectly true in regard to other men, I cannot say; but so far as M'Candlish himself was concerned, I took it with a grain of salt, for no minister that we ever had gave us so many original meanings of passages as he.

As I have already said, he was no student in the proper sense of the word, nevertheless there were days when he would sit in his room from

morning until night, working with feverish energy, and when, in response to incessant appeals, he came forth to supper it would be with bloodshot eyes, pale face, and the air of one who was determined to—

“Scorn delights and live laborious days.”

But alas! these bouts of industry were invariably followed by a relapse into his usual state of Bohemianism, and the end of the week would find him churning butter for the wife when he should have been at his sermon, or sitting on the stump in the pig paddock, watching with tremendous interest the antics of the little pigs, of which we had a greater number than usual that year.

CHAPTER XXIII

“THUNK”

ONE day when I came up from the orchard, where I had been working, I found the parson sitting on a stump in the yard, with a notebook in his hand. At first I thought he was working, but soon saw that he was not; his eyes were fixed on the turkey cocks, and he was dreamily watching them as they strutted up and down. To my mind he was simply idling away his time, and I thought a word of reproof might do him good, so I said—

“Don’t you think, Mr. M’Candlish, that you could find something better to do than watching those silly birds?”

He roused himself up and turned to me with a look of inquiry, as though he did not quite understand, but when I had repeated my question he answered slowly—

“I’m not sure that I could.” Then he quoted with great unction and approval those lines of Wordsworth’s—

“Books, ’tis a dull and endless strife,
Come hear the woodland linnet;
His music’s sweet, and on my life
There’s more of wisdom in it.
One breath from out the vernal wood
Will teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can.”

“That’s gospel truth,” he added, “and it would be a good thing for their hearers if some preachers I know could realise it, for the curse of many a pulpit is nothing more nor less than learned and theological books.”

“But,” said I, “surely there’s a vast difference between a ‘vernal wood’ and that old stump you’re sitting on, and between ‘woodland linnets’ and these absurd turkey-cocks?”

“Yes,” he admitted, “I suppose there is, but still one can learn something of human nature by sitting on a stump watching the turkey-cocks; don’t you think so?”

I replied that I couldn’t exactly see where it came in, and then he said—

“Well, before you came up I was wondering how to spell the sound the gobbler makes

when he comes to the end of his strut—not the gobble, but that other sound—what do you think?” he asked.

I laughed, for I had often tried to puzzle out the same thing myself, but I had never succeeded, and told him so.

“What do you make of it?” I asked, interested in spite of myself.

“Well,” he said, “it seems to me it’s ‘thunk’—T-H-U-N-K, thunk; that’s as near as I can get to it anyway. Then the question is—what does a gobbler mean when he struts and says ‘thunk’?”

I replied that, being unacquainted with the turkey language, I was unable to say.

“Well,” he said, after a minute’s reflection, “I’ll tell you what I think about it. It means, ‘I’m the greatest, grandest, and most important personage on the face of the earth, and I want everybody to know it.’ That’s what thunk means, and a gobbler nearly bursts his gizzard trying to look as big as he feels.

“While I’ve been sitting here,” he continued thoughtfully, “I’ve had hard work to believe that I was not in Collins Street, watching the swells strutting on the block, and every one of them saying ‘thunk.’”

I could not help smiling at this quaint conceit.

“Not bad,” I said ; “but to my mind it’s not only the swells who act the gobbler.”

“No,” he replied, “it’s not, worse luck, although they are the greatest sinners in that respect ; human nature is the same thing in all classes, and there’s just as much conceit amongst the poorer classes as the rich ; the only difference is, the poor can’t sport so many feathers as the rich, consequently they don’t attract so much attention.”

I had nothing to say in reply to this, so he resumed—

“The thing that strikes one most forcibly about a turkey-cock is this : when he’s strutting his hardest, and trying to appear most impressive, he looks the biggest fool. If he could only see himself and realise what a ridiculous idiot he is making of himself, he would give it up for ever.”

“Would you apply the same thing to those who strut on the ‘block’ and in other places ? ”

“Would I? Of course I would. When they strut their hardest they look their silliest ; and if they only knew what absolute he-turkeys they appear in the eyes of sane people, they would sooner die than be seen strutting any more. Robbie Burns put the thing into a nutshell when he said—

“O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us !
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
And foolish notion.’”

“Yes,” I agreed ; “you are about right. A natural-born turkey-cock is bad enough, but when it comes to human ones—well, they are too ridiculous for anything.”

“Ridiculous !” he echoed. “The Bible says concerning certain people that ‘he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them,’ and,” he concluded, as he dropped down off the stump and brushed the dust from his clothes, “I imagine that the people who move the Almighty to laughter must be those who strut and rustle their feathers and say ‘thunk’ when they are about to gobble.”

When he had said this the parson went inside, and from that day I left him to his own devices ; for it seemed to me that although his method of acquiring his facts was not the orthodox method, yet it was probably the one best suited to him. Anyhow, it had enabled him to glean an astonishing knowledge of men and things which resembled Sam Weller’s knowledge of London, in that it was “extensive and peculiar.”

And thus he moved amongst us, a Bohe-

mian of a new type, a religious swashbuckler, and withal an earnest apostle of Jesus Christ, and an effectual ; for through him many in our midst who sat in darkness saw a great light, and have walked in that light to this day, having fellowship one with another, and with God, and with His son Jesus Christ.

Thus the months sped by, and the winter was over and gone. The days lengthened out, the sun grew stronger, and the forest tracks were drying up. The time of the mating of birds was come. The swallows built their nests ; the poultry yards were in a ferment ; the gobblers strutted and “thunked.” The new-born lambs were playing on the hillside, and the foxes were covertly eyeing them from the bracken. The flowers appeared on the earth. The solitary places were made glad by the red glow of the heath. All the mimosas and acacias burst into bloom, and the forest was filled with their yellow fire. The orchards were white with blossoms ; the gardens were full of roses. The air was warm and heavy with perfume, and the huge wool packs were gathered together against the blue of the sky, and rested lazily on the horizon all the day long like mountains of opal and pearl.

CHAPTER XXIV

GOD'S WOMAN

ONE evening about this time a number of young people were over at our place playing quoits, ludo, and other games, for it was in this way and in reading that we filled in the long winter nights. How it came about I cannot now remember, but during the evening M'Candlish got teased unmercifully about Jinny Stirling, and, what was more, he did not seem to relish it. This was not lost upon me, and after the visitors had left, and the others had gone to bed, leaving M'Candlish and myself sitting by the fire, I took the opportunity to ask him if there really was anything in what the lads had said concerning Jinny and himself. I was quite satisfied in my own mind, from what I had seen and heard, that it was all arranged between them, but I wanted to know the truth from his own lips.

Instead of answering my question he drew his chair up to the fire and sat staring into the coals in deep thought, and remained so long silent that I was beginning to think he had forgotten the matter altogether. At length, however, he drew a deep breath, and said slowly : "No ; no, there's nothing in it—that is, there's nothing of the kind they alluded to. A fellow can't look at a girl these days without people getting it into their heads that he is breaking his neck after her. Jinny and I are good friends, but nothing more. We like each other's company, and we get on very well together ; but it's friendship pure and simple."

This was a great surprise to me, for ever since he came to the forest the new parson and Jinny had been almost inseparable. Wherever they met—at church, at the railway station, or at choir practice—M'Candlish invariably went home with her. Old Mr. and Mrs. Stirling made him very welcome, and we had all come to think that they were going to make a match of it ; and as they appeared to be well suited to each other, and both were very popular, we had been greatly pleased at the way things were going. So you may easily imagine that the revelation of the true state of affairs gave me a considerable shock.

I was not only surprised, but annoyed, and when I had thought it over I asked him rather sarcastically if it were a "platonic" friendship. He did not appear to notice the sarcasm, and replied quite seriously—

"Yes, that's just what it is, a platonic friendship."

I looked at him keenly, to see if he really meant what he said, and when I had satisfied myself that he did I said—

"Well, if you don't mind taking the advice of one who is older than yourself, the best thing you can do is to drop this platonic friendship right away. Such a friendship may have been possible to Plato, with his years and views of life, but as a general principle, and in the case of young people especially, the thing is an utter absurdity. There never was a friendship of that kind that did not end disastrously, and what's more, in the very nature of things there never can be. Sooner or later, it means misery to one or the other or both."

"Do you really think that?"

"I do indeed, and I would lay it down as an established principle that a platonic friendship invariably ends in a broken heart, and if you don't mean to marry Jinny Stirling——"

"Marry Jinny Stirling!" he exclaimed, starting up and looking at me in amazement, "Marry Jinny Stirling! Why, I haven't even dreamt of such a thing."

"Maybe you haven't," I replied, "but others have, and she has."

"She has," he repeated after me in amazement—"she has! Whatever has put that idea into your head? Did she tell you?"

"Tell me, no; she would rather die. But I know it just as certainly as if she had told me. One has only to watch her face when you are near by, or her manner when the others chaff her about you. Mr. M'Candlish," I went on, "it's as plain as the sun in the heavens that the girl loves you with all the strength she has, and if you don't mean business you are doing her a very great injury."

At that there came such a look of distress into his face that I felt sorry for him. Presently he said—

"I hope you are wrong; I hope with all my heart you are wrong. I wouldn't have had that happen for anything. And besides, it's the very thing I tried to avoid."

"Well," said I, flying off at a tangent, "you must be very hard to please. Jinny Stirling is the finest-looking girl in this forest, and that's

saying a good deal. She comes of a fine Scotch stock, she is as good as gold herself, and is fit to be the wife of any minister who walks the earth. Why, half the fellows in the forest are mad after her, and would give ten years of their lives for the chance you have."

"Yes," he replied, "I know that. Jinny is all you say, and a great deal more; but she can never be other to me than she is to-day, for—well, to tell you the truth, there's somebody else."

Here was news indeed, for we had all reached the conclusion long ago that M'Candlish was heart free when first he came to the forest.

"Does Jinny know?" I demanded coldly.

"Yes, she does," he replied. "She and I have talked the matter over many a time."

I was greatly relieved to hear this. Perhaps I had been mistaken about Jinny after all. Anyhow, if she knew of the other woman it was her own fault if she allowed her feelings to get the better of her.

"Well," I remarked reproachfully, after a pause, "you might have told us something about it before."

M'Candlish smiled rather quaintly, I thought.

"I didn't know you were interested, and besides, I'm not sure that I could tell you a

great deal, for I'm afraid I don't know much about it myself."

This struck me as being rather odd, but I only said jokingly—

"Well, you might have described her appearance to us."

"Told you what she is like?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think I could have done that; at least, I have my own idea about her."

I looked at him in amazement. Was the man going mad? He did not look mad; instead, there was on his face just then a look of lively intelligence. After another pause I remarked—

"Well, I reckon you ought to have an idea."

"I have," he answered instantly, "for I've seen her in my dreams many a time."

Again I stared at him, but he was still gazing with rapt expression into the tossing flames of the fire, as though he were looking at her image there; perhaps he was.

"Well," I asked, "and what is the young lady like?"

"In the first place she is tall; I always did like tall women," he added.

"Yes."

"Tall and 'well-to-do,' to quote Stevenson's

phrase." I understood him to refer not to wealth but physique.

"Yes."

"Her hands and feet are small and shapely."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and her hair is brown and wavy."

He was plainly working up as he went along, and the vision grew upon him.

"Good."

"Her forehead is pure and even."

"Yes."

"Her eyes are large, and blue, and—and bright."

"Are they?"

"She has a nose and mouth of faultless beauty." By this time he had grown enthusiastic, and turned to me with an expression that plainly asked—

"Did you ever know one to equal her?"

"She must be very beautiful indeed," I said, and then added, "And where does the young lady live?"

At this his countenance fell somewhat, and he replied rather blankly—

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No; I wish to goodness I did."

I began to see daylight; they had fallen out

and separated ; that explained also why no letters had come from her.

" Ah ! " said I sympathetically, " I see how the land lies ; it's the old, old story, the course of true love never did run smooth ; but cheer up, it will all come right in the end."

He looked at me rather doubtfully, as though he did not quite grasp my meaning ; so to clear matters up I said—

" How long is it since you quarrelled ? "

" Since we quarrelled ? "

" Yes."

" We've never had a quarrel in our lives."

" Then she went off without a word, and without giving you a reason."

" No, she did not."

" She didn't ; then how long is it since she wrote to you ? "

He smiled dismally, and shook his head.

" She has never written."

" Has never written you ? " I was getting desperate. " She must be a queer woman."

" No," he replied, " not queer ; just unusual."

" Oh, well, do you think she loves you ? "

" I don't know about that now, but I am sure she will love me when we meet."

" I see."

This was not strictly true, for I did not see in the least ; but after I had reflected upon this extraordinary statement and made nothing of it, I asked—

“Do you ever try to find her out?”

“I’m always trying, and when I came to this forest I hoped to find her here, but I’m afraid she is not, for I’ve been pretty well all over it now, and I’ve not seen her so far.”

“If it’s not a rude question, what might the young lady’s name be?” I asked, for I know nearly every soul in the forest, and thought I might help him. “What’s her name?”

“Her name?”

“Yes, her name.”

“That I can’t tell you.”

“You mean you had rather not tell.”

“Oh no, I don’t. I would tell you fast enough if I could. In fact, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to proclaim it upon the housetops, but the trouble is I don’t know.”

“You don’t know her name?” I gasped.

“No, worse luck.”

This was almost a complete knock-out ; but like Quanko Samba in Alfred Jingle’s famous cricket match, I summoned up all my remaining strength for a last desperate try.

"How long is it since you first met her?"

"So far," he said, "I've never met her; but I'm hoping to do so soon."

At this astonishing confession I sat bolt upright in my chair and looked at him.

"Do you mean to tell me that you are in love with a woman you don't know, whom you have never seen, and of whom you have not even heard?"

"That's what I've been trying to tell you from the beginning, only you would keep jumping at conclusions. But what's the matter? there's nothing very strange in that, is there?"

And he looked at me with the innocent, wondering eyes of a child, and I really think this man imagined that this love of his was the most natural and everyday thing in the world.

"But you don't mean to say that you really love this—this dream woman?"

"I do indeed; I love her with all my heart; and when things go wrong, and the way is dreary, the thought of her is, next to Christ the greatest comfort that I have."

"And you are waiting for her to come?"

"Yes."

"Been waiting long?"

“Ever so long.”

“Do you never feel impatient?”

“Impatience is no name for it. I think the hardest thing one is ever called upon to do in this world is to sit down and wait patiently for an indefinite time under trying circumstances; and besides, hope deferred maketh the heart sick.”

“Yes,” said I, “I agree with you there; and another thing, when one has waited a long time, and waited in vain, there’s a great temptation to give up the ideal and take the best that offers.”

He nodded his head. “Yes, that’s right, and I might have done that like many another fool, only I’ve always had an awful fear that if I did I would no sooner be married than my twin soul would come to me, and then, when I thought of what life would mean, tied to a woman whom I only half loved, and separated for ever from the one I loved with all my strength—well, it seemed to me that it was better to go single and lonely all my days than risk it.”

“Still,” said I, beginning to fear that this was rather a dangerous belief when carried to such extremes, “still you must not forget the old couplet—

“‘She would not look at the walkers,
And the riders all passed by.’

This dream woman may be just a fancy ; or, if she be a reality, suppose she were to die, and never come ? ”

“I don’t think she will die,” he replied ; “but anyhow I must be true to her, and just go on waiting and waiting ; and I’d rather wait all my life, and wait in vain, than marry any other woman than the one God intended for me. For happiness does not consist in being married, but in being married to the right person.”

“That’s perfectly true,” I agreed ; “but it seems to me that you’ve got all your eggs in one basket—it’s a very frail basket, too, and you run a big risk of losing them ; however, I hope it will all come out right : you know the old French saying, that ‘everything comes to the man who can wait’ ? ”

“Yes,” he replied ; “and there’s a good deal of truth in it, though I’m inclined to think myself that in the majority of cases everything waits for the man who comes ; that’s my nature, too,” he added, “and that makes it doubly hard for me to wait.”

“Yes,” said I, “I suppose so ; but what

put this dream woman into your head first of all ? ”

“ I don’t call her a dream woman ; I call her God’s woman.”

“ Oh, why is that ? ”

“ Well, because I believe ”—and he spoke slowly and deliberately, as one who weighs every word—“ I believe that God makes people in pairs. When God made the first man he made a woman to be a helpmeet to him ; and, rightly or wrongly, I think that God has gone on in the same way ever since. Whenever He makes a man He makes a woman, and fits her in every way to be the man’s complement ; each will satisfy the other perfectly. And I believe, too, that though the one may be born in the farthest forests of Canada, and the other in the deepest bush of the Australian interior, or, what is more to the point, though the one may have been born in the highest circles of society and the other in the lowest, yet if they will only wait God’s time, and seek His guidance, He will bring them together and make them happy, though all the world stood up to forbid the banns. That’s my creed,” he went on, “ my solemn belief ; I believe God has a woman for me, my twin soul, my helpmeet, my affinity, if you like, and sooner or

later she will come to me, and then—well, that will be glory for me.”

“Sometimes,” he added, “she seems very near to me ; there are nights when I lie awake and fancy I can hear the coming of her feet ; at other times she seems far away, and then life is a bit dull ; but, near or far, I’m going to wait.”

“And in the meantime ?”

“Well, in the meantime I’ll just go on quietly with my work and try in God’s strength so to live that I shall be worthy of her when she does come. The one great regret,” he said after a pause, during which he had stared sadly into the fire—“the one great regret of my life is that I shall not be able to bring to her the same pure record and sweet innocence of heart that I know she is bringing to me ; for I have come to believe in the same standard for both sexes, ‘a white life for two’ ; I think now that no man has a right to expect more purity and chastity from a woman than he is prepared to give her in return ; and I would to God I had understood this years ago.”

We were silent awhile, he thinking bitterly, I suppose, of a day of folly, as most men have to do, and I pondering over his words, and trying to estimate their real value. Then, wish-

ing to put him into a happier frame of mind, I asked jokingly—

“But how will you know ‘God’s woman’ when she comes?”

The shadow passed from his face, he rose from the rocking-chair, and, standing up to the full of his six feet one, he stretched himself, and yawned luxuriously; then, smiling as he looked down upon me, he said—

“You reminded me just now of an old saying; here’s another :—

“‘Thou shalt know her when she comes,
Not by any din of drums
Neither by her crown,
Nor her gown,
Nor by anything she wears,
Nor the vantage of her airs,
Only shall she well known be
By the holy harmony
That her coming wakes in thee.’”

Then he dropped back into the chair with a more serious expression on his face, and said—

“But to come back to the point we started from; what you’ve told me about Jinny Stirling troubles me greatly; I can hardly believe it possible. It’s true that when first I saw her I thought she might be God’s woman, but I was

not two hours in her company before I knew she was not, and I've told her from the beginning, as plainly as I could speak, that there could be nothing between us but friendship, pure and simple."

"And she agreed to that?"

"Of course she did. Do you think I would have gone about with her as I did if she had not?"

"You did not lead her to think—that—well, that you were courting her?"

"No, I did not; I told her plainly that there was no sentiment in the matter at all, and I told her later on that if she felt the friendship was doing her any harm it would be better to give it up. But she said that it was all right, and she did not see why we should give it up, so we let it rest at that."

"Well, if that's the case, it's her own lookout if she has let herself go; but if you'll take my advice you'll have less to do with her in the future, for it's the talk of the forest now, and it's bound to end up in a row."

My last thoughts that night were sad ones, for I felt sure that the parson was in for a bad time. As for M'Candlish, he went to bed and dreamed of God's woman; and when he awoke his sleep was sweet to him.

CHAPTER XXV

TOMMY

TOMMY had been the mission horse for upwards of eight years, and was known and loved for his sterling good qualities by every man, woman, and child in the mission district. He was not beautiful to look upon, being somewhat low and stunted in stature, and, moreover, having a mane and tail long enough, and strong enough, for an animal three times his size. But if you knew anything of horses, you would be sure to notice the clear, bold eye, the fine intelligent head, and the huge chest and shoulders that told their tale of strength and endurance.

In colour Tommy was a very ordinary chestnut, and, like every chestnut I have known, he had one fault and a bad habit. The fault was a weakness of the flesh due to his colour, and amounted to this, he had a playful way

of trying his teeth on your ribs or some other unprotected part of your person at most unexpected moments. The habit, on the other hand, was the result of education ; and thereby hangs a tale.

The missionary into whose hands Tommy fell, when a raw colt—he came to the mission work eight years ago, and who was mainly responsible for his education—was a very young man named Matthews, who happened to be a particularly skilful horseman, with a method of mounting a horse peculiar to himself. His custom was to lead Tommy out on to the track, and, despising the stirrups, he would place his left hand, in which the reins were firmly held, on the pommel of the saddle ; he would then give Tommy a dig in the ribs with the thumb of his right hand, and as Tommy bounded forward in response Matthews would swing himself easily and gracefully into the saddle.

This method of mounting has the double advantage of being both showy and expeditious, and if, like Matthews, one is something of a circus rider, it is hard to imagine anything better ; but if one should happen to be just an ordinary horseman—and most missionaries do happen so to be—it is hard to imagine anything more difficult.

In course of time Tommy learned to anticipate the poke in the ribs, and directly a hand was laid upon the pommel of the saddle—a thing we all do in mounting—he would bound forward like a rocket, and long before Matthews had left the forest this promptitude in getting away was the settled habit of Tommy's life.

There's a fatality about these things, too, for the missionary who followed Matthews was not only well up in years, but so abnormally short and stout that he was unable to mount any horse without standing on a chair or a stump; and his mounting of the quietest animal was always a matter of much careful calculation of distances before he made the supreme effort which seated him in the saddle.

When, therefore, this modern Falstaff essayed to ride on Tommy, my wife and I were a good deal concerned as to the result; Dick the Dasher, on the contrary, was full of gleeful anticipations: there was to be some fun, and he was to be in it; and to make things sure—as I found out afterwards—he took the missionary, whose name was Studley, aside and imparted to him some friendly counsel, thus:—

“When yer get ’im up ter the stump, yer

want ter sing out, 'Weey, Tommy,' at the top ov yer voice, so as ter frighten 'im a bit, an' make 'im take notice ov yer. An' take a good lump ov a switch, an' shake it at 'im before yer get on ter 'im, so as 'e'll know wot to expect if 'e comes any tricks on yer. The only way ter manage a chestnut 'orse is ter boss 'im. You let 'im know you're boss first act, an' you'll be able ter do anythink with 'im, but if once 'e gets it in ter 'ees 'ed that you're frightened ov 'im, well, you'll 'ave a time, you take my word." And Studley did, to his own undoing.

At the time appointed I went out and saddled Tommy and brought him round to the track, and presently, to my astonishment, I saw Studley approaching with a huge switch in his hand.

"What on earth are you going to do with that?" I asked.

"I'm going to let him see I'm boss," he answered, and with that he shook the switch furiously in Tommy's face. Tommy, like all chestnuts, was simply a mass of quivering nerves, and leapt back as though he had been shot; and from that time on he eyed Studley with horror. Whenever he approached Tommy backed, and after some time vainly

spent in trying to put his hand upon him Studley had nearly given up the idea of riding altogether. However, after we had talked the matter over, Studley with some difficulty clambered up on a stump and balanced himself there as well as he could, while I led Tommy round and round it in the hope of getting him near enough for Studley to spring on to his back. But the horse seemed disinclined to come near, and one can hardly be surprised that he did.

Seven times I marched Tommy round that stump, like the Israelites compassing Jericho, before I got him near enough for Mr. Studley to mount, and then no sooner was he standing within reach than Studley roared in a voice of thunder, "Weey, Tommy," at the same time stamping his foot heavily on the stump. I was somewhat startled myself, and as for Tommy he fairly leapt in the air, and nearly dragged my arm from its socket in his desperate endeavour to get away.

My mother and wife, who were watching proceedings from the verandah, seemed unable to decide whether they were looking upon a tragedy or a comedy; their faces had a puzzled expression. Dick the Dasher, who had been leaning against the fence with a well-simulated

look of sympathy on his face, hurried into the stable, and I knew from the sounds that came out of it that he had gone to save appearances. Personally I had begun to suspect Master Dick's share in the matter, and felt angry; but Mr. Studley seemed to take it all as part of the piece, and bade me "bring him round again."

This was easier said than done, and I had just about given up when, something having taken Tommy's attention across the paddock, he stood still for a moment and within easy distance. I nodded to Studley that this was his opportunity; he evidently thought so too, and bowing himself together, he sprang as lightly as a baby elephant for the saddle. But alas! poor man, in that instant Tommy looked round, and seeing that black mass descending upon him, he gave a snort of terror and sprang wildly forward, and Studley, instead of lighting on the saddle, lit just behind it.

Tommy's terror knew no bounds; he tore the reins out of my hands, and although he did not buck, he fairly flew up the slope of the hill, Falstaff, because of abdominal disabilities, bestriding him bolt upright. It never seemed to occur to him to grasp the saddle, consequently he lost ground at once: inch by

inch he slipped backwards, until at last, just as Tommy cleared a small drain, he slid over his tail and struck the ground with a mighty thud, rolled over and over like a cask, and finally came to a stop in a clump of bracken.

Fortunately no bones were broken, and while I got him on his feet again and dusted his clothes Dick the Dasher went after Tommy, and presently brought him back through the scrub. However, there was no more riding that day; Studley had had enough.

Tommy was the hero of a hundred adventures such as this, all of which were told with great unction by the forest people, and each one seemed to make him more precious in their eyes, so it was joy to our hearts when we found that M'Candlish was able to understand and appreciate him.

And I'm perfectly sure that one reason why M'Candlish gained such an extraordinary hold upon the majority of the forest people, and kept his hold upon them, was the fact, soon known everywhere, that he was good to Tommy.

And let me say this right here and now, I've seen a good many missionaries come and go in my time; some have been successful, and some have not; I have neither the inclina-

tion nor the ability to sit in judgment upon them, or to try to tell the why and wherefore of their success, or want of it. But I'm going to set down a solemn fact, and it is this : I never knew a missionary yet who failed in the pulpit or out of it who was good to his horse ; and I have never known one who succeeded there or anywhere else who was not.

And if this that I write should ever fall into the hands of a young missionary, I would say to him that of all the ways by which a man may travel to the hearts of a bush congregation there is none surer than this—be good to your horse : feed him well, groom him well ; always have him looking well, even if you have to deny yourself of many things to do it ; and you will be well repaid, for if your people see that you are good to your horse they will be good to you, and forgive you a great deal in the way of poor sermons and failures of other kinds. And who is there among us that does not occasionally need forgiveness ?

CHAPTER XXVI

AN EARLY MORNING RIDE, AND THE LOGIC OF THREEPENNY-BITS

ONE day in the beginning of the first week in October, M'Candlish announced that he was going up to Terang the following Friday ; he had several reasons for going, but the chief was that his second quarter having ended with September, and all the contributions from the different churches having come in, he found it necessary to go to Terang to bank the money, and make some needful purchases ; and besides, his was a nature that loved change, and I've no doubt that at times he found the life of the forest a bit monotonous, and was glad of the opportunity to have a day in such a bright, busy, up-to-date town as Terang.

When he told us what he intended doing, Dick the Dasher straightway asked permission

to take a day off and accompany him, and no one was surprised when on Wednesday evening Alex Black came across and announced his intention of going too, for Dick and Alex were inseparable.

So on Friday morning, about six o'clock, the three set out in high spirits, and as they rode away from the house, stooping slightly over their saddles, and with their feet thrust into their stirrup-irons almost to the heels of their boots, I was greatly struck by the appearance they presented. Nowhere could you find more typical Colonials than these. All three were long of limb, spare of form, and athletic-looking, and all three sat their horses carelessly, yet easily and gracefully as the fabled Greeks.

The morning was beautifully clear, a morning without clouds, the tracks were all fast drying up, the horses were fresh and in good condition and impatient as their masters to be off, and I could not but envy the lads their ride, for of all the joys on earth there is scarcely one to equal a long gallop through the forest, in good company, in the early morning of a spring day. How well poor old Gordon realised that and set it to the music of his verse—

“O ’twas merry in the glowing morn
Amid the rustling grass
To wander, as we’ve wandered many a mile,
To blow the cool tobacco cloud
And watch the white wreaths pass,
Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while.”

And as these set out their hearts were big with expectation, and the parson, languid and indifferent though he seemed, was perhaps the most eager of the three. Somehow M’Candlish always reminded me of a volcano—snow and ice on top, raging fire beneath.

As far as the first gate they were moderate enough, though the horses were dancing about and eager to be away, but when they had got into the open forest the parson suddenly tore his hat from his head, and with a yell that might have been heard a mile away set off down the track at a terrific pace. Dick the Dasher was after him instantly, shouting like mad. Alex said nothing, for he had his slouch hat between his teeth, but he took the reins in both his hands, sat low down on his horse, and set to work to overhaul the others.

Oh the glory of a wild bush ride. Who that has ever known it can forget the thrill! And who that has not known can imagine the great turbulent joy that surged within these

three as they tore along the track, lying flat on their saddles to escape the overhanging branches, and missing death, or the fate of Absalom, a hundred times in every half-mile! Who indeed?

Don't talk to me of the pleasures of life if you have never had an experience such as this, for I will maintain against the world that he who has never ridden a race on a bush track in the early morning does not know what the thrill of a healthy excitement is.

On they raced for a mile or more; then, as they swept round a curve, Alex, who had been saving every inch in the turns, and was slowly but surely drawing up with the parson, suddenly gave a shout of warning, and flinging himself back on his horse, strove with all his strength to pull her in, at the same time shouting out—

“Mind where you're goin'. Look out—look out—lo-ok o-ou-out!”

The trunk of a newly fallen tree, full six feet high, lay right across the road, and only fifty yards away.

Dick had seen it almost at the same instant as Alex, and was hanging on to his horse's head for dear life. The parson must have seen it before either of them, but instead of trying to pull Tommy up, he held on his way. It did not occur to the others for a moment that he

would be mad enough to put the little horse at that wall of timber, but when his purpose became clear, Alex, with a thrill of fear, cried—

“By the livin’ Jingo, if ’e ain’t goin’ ter put Tommy at it.” While Dick yelled with all his might, “P-p-pu-ll u-up y-y-you fo-fo-fool! you’ll b-b-break y-y-you-r bloo-oom-in’ n-n-ne-eck!” the words being fairly shaken out of him by the plunging of his horse.

But the warning was unheeded: the only move the parson made was to pull his hat further down over his eyes and slightly slacken his pace. Without a moment’s hesitation the brave little horse rose at the enormous log, seemed to scramble a moment on top, then disappeared with his rider on the farther side.

Dick and Alex reined in their horses and looked at each other significantly—

“Wot did I tell yer?” Dick asked with a ring of triumph in his voice. After a moment he added, “Ain’t ’e a carver?”

“’E is, right enough; ’e takes the sandwich. I wouldn’t a’ berlieved it if I ’adn’t a’ seen ’im do it. I reckon old Cameron ain’t too bad—are yer Cameron?” He patted his horse affectionately as he addressed her. “She ain’t too bad. I’ve ’ad ’er over the Warrnambool steeplechase course many a time, and there isn’t

much that'll stop 'er, but before I'd run 'er at a thing like that, I'd—I'd—well I'd eat me bloomin' 'at: by cripes!"

With that they plunged into the forest, and skirting the *débris* of the fallen tree, reached the track on the other side, half expecting to find both horse and rider with their necks broken; but to their intense relief they found the parson sitting on Tommy quietly waiting for them to come. If he had felt in any degree excited by what he had done, the excitement had passed away, and he looked as serene and unconcerned as though jumping a horse barely fifteen hands high, over a log more than eighteen feet in girth, was a very everyday occurrence.

"You fellows were a long time coming," he said.

"Yes," Dick replied, "but if we'd a' been ridin' on flyin' machines, we'd a' been 'ere sooner."

When Alex emerged from the scrub he rode straight to the parson, and extending his hand, said very heartily—

"I used ter think that I could ride a bit, Mr. M'Candlish, but I give you the belt; I reckon you're the toughest joint ever I tackled; there isn't another man in this forest could 'ave took Tommy over that log."

M'Candlish looked at him with the expression of tired indifference on his face that was natural to him, and replied disinterestedly—

“You mean there isn't another man in the forest would have been fool enough to try. But I'm sure of this,” he added more brightly, “there isn't another horse in the forest could have done it, no matter who the rider was.”

Then they rode on again, but quietly now, for neither on horseback nor in life can we gallop all the time. Indeed, life is mostly a walk, and a slow one, too ; and it's just there that the hardness of it comes in for the man of active temperament ; and that's why I always think that “He shall walk and not faint” is a more far-reaching promise than “He shall run and not be weary.” In the big things of life we ever find it easier to run than to walk.

After a time, Dick the Dasher, who had been looking rather curiously at the parson, suddenly asked—

“Wot the dooce is that you've got hangin' outer yer pocket ? Looks like the leg of a woman's sock ; one er them meat-safe ones, too,” he added.

The parson clapped his hand to his side, grasped the article in question, and drew it forth ; and sure enough it was a lady's stock-

ing, of an open-work pattern, that had somehow suggested to Dick's remarkable mind the perforated zinc of a meat-safe. The parson held it up at arm's length, and Dick saw at once that the foot part was filled up with something very weighty.

"In the name ov goodness, w're did yer git it, an' wot 'ave yer got in it?"

The parson swung the stocking towards Dick. "Feel it," he said. Dick did so; then with astonished look—

"W'y, it feels like money."

"It is money."

"Then wot in thunder——?"

The parson laughed. "There were three pounds worth of threepenny-bits in the Wilderness collections this quarter," he said, "and I wanted to take them right out of the forest, so I borrowed this stocking from Mrs. Watson to carry them in, and here they are. The leg of the stocking must have got shaken out of my pocket when I jumped the log," he added.

"Well," Alex remarked, "that's the rummiest purse ever I seen in me life."

Dick's mind was on another track.

"Wot are yer takin' the thrummies away fer?" he asked.

"Well," said M'Candlish, "I reckon it's the

very essence of meanness and sin for a man to feel in his pocket, when the plate comes round, and give the smallest coin he can find there to God ; but that's just what most of these people are doing, and I'm going to have a try to cure them. Besides, I'm just sick of the sight of threepenny-bits in the collections. If I took these to the store at Timboon, they would all go back into circulation again ; but if I take them right out of the forest, well, when they haven't threepenny-bits to give, they'll have to give sixpences, they won't be able to give pennies, for shame sake."

Dick the Dasher shook his head.

"Don't make any mistake, Mr. M'Candlish," he said ; "if you take my advice, you'll carry 'em all back to the forest and let 'em go round again, fer as sure as you're a livin' soul, if the majority of them people 'aven't got a thripenny-bit to give, they won't give anythink. There was a feller down 'ere once," he continued, "named Ballantyne, an' 'e got 'old of the same idea that you've got, so 'e took all the thripenny-bits 'e could lay 'ees 'ands on out ter Warrnambool, an' changed 'em inter bigger money, an' wot was the consequence ? W'y the collections next quarter fell off to nothink."

"They're very careful people down here," he

went on, "an' they don't berlieve in bein' extravagant—specially in religion—an' if they wos ter give anythin' over a thripenny-bit, they'd feel as though they'd been plungin', it's against their principles ter plunge, an' they won't do it; you take my word." After thinking it over, the parson decided to do so; he brought the objectionable coins back with him when he returned that night, and a few days later they found their way to the store, and so once more they went on their pilgrimage.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW THEY BROUGHT THE WEDDING CAKE HOME FROM TERANG

WHAT are you puzzling your brains over, Alex? You look as sober as an emu."

"Me? Oh, I was just wonderin' 'ow I'm goin' ter git the weddin' cake 'ome without breakin' it."

"The what?"

"The weddin' cake."

"The wedding cake?"

"Yas."

"What wedding cake?"

"Liz's. I promised 'er I'd give 'er a bit ov a surprise on 'er weddin' day, so I wrote up ter Terang an' ordered a weddin' cake. They were only goin' ter 'ave a 'ome-made one—I ordered one three stories 'igh; ice an' feathers an' all. I'm ter bring it 'ome to-day, an' I was just wonderin' 'ow I was goin' ter kerry it."

“ You’ll have a contract right enough.”

“ Yes, but I’ll manage it some’ow.”

“ I guess you will, and we’ll do all we can to help you.”

“ Thanks.”

It was six o’clock in the evening before, their business completed, our three bush-whackers were ready to start for home ; and it was dusk when they drew rein at the baker’s shop and bade him bring forth the wedding cake.

Then arose a great discussion as to the safest and best method of carrying it. Dick was for taking it to pieces, and each carrying one storey ; but this Alex flatly refused to sanction. However, it was decided eventually to remove the decorations from the top and make them into a separate parcel ; the body of the cake was then placed in a canvas sugar-bag, which Alex nursed very carefully on the pommel of his saddle ; the decorations were committed to the tender care of Dick the Dasher ; and not without rather grave apprehensions they set out for home. Night was falling as they skirted the lake and struck into the Ecklin road.

About three o’clock the following morning I was awakened by the barking of the dogs, and knowing it to be the lads returning, I rose and, partly dressing myself, went out to meet

them. When I reached the verandah they were nearly at the gate, but to my surprise they had only one horse between them; the parson was mounted, but the other two were on foot, one on either side of him, and apparently hanging on to the stirrup leathers. Wondering greatly, I shouted, "What's the matter?"

"It's all right." It was Dick the Dasher who answered me.

"But where are the horses?"

"That's wot we'd like to know."

"Why, what have you done with them?"

"Wot 'ave they done with us?"

Then the parson began to laugh, and the others joined in, and for a time none of them could speak; but after a while M'Candlish recovered himself a little, and said to me—

"Take this blessed bag, will you, please," at the same time handing down a bulky parcel that he had been carrying before him on the saddle; "and be very careful of it," he added, "for there's a wedding cake inside it."

"A wedding cake?" I gasped, taking the bag from him.

"Yes."

"Lizzie Stirling's?"

"Yes."

"It strikes me it will be a queer cake if

you've carried it all the way from Terang in this fashion."

At this they fell to laughing again, while I, in great perplexity, took the bag from the parson's hands and carried it into the kitchen, where I placed it on the table.

Presently, having disposed of Tommy, they came inside, and flinging themselves down on chairs, looked at each other, and once more fell to laughing, and continued until the tears rolled down their faces and they scarce had strength left to sit up.

Then I noticed that although the parson looked pretty much the same as usual, Dick and Alex were covered with dirt.

"What in the world has happened?" I demanded.

Dick the Dasher pulled himself together sufficiently to be able to reply, but he was careful to refrain from looking at the others while he did so.

"Well, it was like this," he said. "Alex promised Liz that he'd give 'er a surprise on 'er weddin' day, an' wot did 'e do but write to Terang an' order a weddin' cake, three stories 'igh, an' all the proper fixin's.

"Well, w'en we come ter go fer it, the question wos, 'ow were we goin' ter kerry it 'ome.

I wanted ter take the thing ter pieces, an' it would a' been better for us if we 'ad ; 'owever they wouldn't take my advice, so the baker put it in a sugar-bag, all but the deckerashuns ; I took them meself, an' there they are"—pointing to a battered-looking parcel, covered with sand, that he had laid upon the table.

"We got along all right until we come to Dodger's place this side ov Ecklin, Alex an' Mr. M'Candlish kerryin' the cake turn about. At Dodger's Alex took it, an' as the track wos good an' everythink clear w'en we come along it in the morning, we thought we'd 'ave a bit ov a canter. There wos room for two, so me an' Alex rode ahead side by side ; we went at a pretty good bat, fer the 'orses wanted to git 'ome, an' we wos talkin' about the cake, an' fixin' up ter keep it dark, an' sneak it inter the 'ouse, an' put it on the table at the weddin' breakfast, without anybody knowin' wot was comin'.

"Alex wos just sayin' wot a surprise Liz would get w'en she seen it, w'en all ov a sudden both our 'orses tripped over somethin' on the road an' come down wollop, an' we shot over their 'eds, an'—— By cripes ! I reckon Liz will git a surprise w'en she sees that cake !"

At this they all began laughing again, and

Dick was unable to proceed, but the parson having had a drink of water from the bucket that always stood by the fireplace, gained sufficient control of himself to be able to finish the story.

“When I came up to them,” he said, “I found that both horses had cleared out into the forest, and we haven’t seen them since ; Alex was lying face down on top of the wedding cake, and Dick on the decorations, and both laughing fit to kill themselves ; we couldn’t find the horses, so we came home as you saw ; and here we are, cake, decorations, and all.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE OLD ORDER AND THE NEW

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon. The day was warm and still; the hills were gleaming like hills of gold in the sunshine, for they were covered all over with yellow dandelions. The bees were humming busily amongst the flowers and blossoms in the garden, and old Mrs. Stirling was dozing peacefully on the front verandah. She was aroused by the creaking of the garden gate, and looking up, beheld the portly form of her lifelong friend and neighbour, Mrs. M'Phee. Rising quickly with a "Losh me," she bustled down the steps to meet her.

"Losh, Maggie, and is it yoursel'? come away inside; an' hoo are ye?"

"A'm fery weel, Janet, thank you; an' hoo's yoursel'?"

“Oh, A’m chjust graund ; but come away in an’ tak’ aff yer things.”

In a very short time Mrs. M’Phee’s bonnet was laid on the bed, her knitting brought out of her capacious pocket, her spectacles adjusted, and her body comfortable in a rocking-chair ; while Mrs. Stirling was busy getting the inevitable cup of tea.

“Ye’ll take a cup of tea, Maggie ? ”

“I will an’ welcome. The sun wass quite hot ass I cam’ down the creek, an’ A’m feelin’ thirsty. It’s a Pearfect day, but I alwes think that the fearst hot days try one more than the summer itsel’.”

“We’re no sa young ass we used to be, Janet.”

“Aye weel, an’ that’s true ; but still we could do a day’s wark wi’ most o’ the young ones yet.”

“That we could.”

“I wass expecting to find you up to your eyes in wark, getting ready for the wedding.”

“Were you now ? Weel, we will be bussy, too ; but Lizzie hass been getting ready for a while now—they’re bringing their furniture from Melbourne—but after all, it isn’t a great deal ; for they’re starting in a fery small way, i puir things.”

Now, if the truth must be told, quite a number of people in the forest were opposed to this wedding on the ground that Charlie Black was a poor man. It was thought by many that Lizzie might have done much better in the matrimonial market. Mrs. M'Phee was one of those who thought so ; and her object in visiting her old friend at this particular time was to have a serious talk to her about the matter. Mrs. Stirling's last words had given her the opportunity she desired, so she went straight to the point.

"Don't you think, Janet," she said, "that it's an awfu' peety for a lassie like Lizzie, that's been used to effery comfort, to haf to go out an' rough it? I've naething to say against Chairlie, he's a fearful nice man, an' will make a guid hussband ; but he hass nothing except that half section down the river. Don't ye think, Janet, that Lizzie micht haf done a great deal petter than Chairlie Black? There wass young Wilson now——"

Mrs. Stirling interrupted, "You take milk and sugar, Maggie?"

"A fery little sugar."

"Ah, weel—an' will you haf a scone and butter? Lizzie made the scones this morning. A'm sorry we've no cake to offer you, but——"

"Indeed, you need not apologise ; I would rather haf the scone." And by way of proving her words, Mrs. M'Phee took a liberal mouthful ; while Mrs. Stirling, having poured out a cup of tea for herself, set the plate of scones within easy reach and settled herself on the sofa.

"You were saying about Lizzie an' young Wilson, Maggie ?"

"I wass ; wouldn't he haf been a better match for her than Chairlie Black ?"

"Weel," Mrs. Stirling replied slowly, sipping at her tea and gazing reflectively into the cup, "weel, A'm no so sure. Geordie Wilson iss weel to do, ass you say—his faither left him fery comfortable ; but Geordie was aye too fast for my likin'. It would haf been a fine thing for my Lizzie to haf been the mistress of 'Glenorchy,' but money iss not efferything."

"That's fery true, Janet, but at the same time money is a guid deal in life, and Chairlie, puir feller, hass fery little of it."

"Weel, I cannot deny that, but he iss a real man, iss Chairlie. He hass the respect of efferypoddy. He's strong an' capable, an' knows what he's about. He neither drinks nor gambles ; an' what's best of all, he's a Christian man And I would rather trust

my Lizzie to a guid Christian man, even if he hadn't a penny to bless himself with, than I would to a man who wass not a Christian, no matter how well off he micht be."

"But still I think Lizzie micht haf done better for herself."

"She micht, too, so far ass money iss concerned ; but I think a man iss rich, not according to his money, but according to his character and way of life. The richest men and the real catches are the men of strong character and clean life, and in that way Chairlie Black iss a millionaire."

Mrs. M'Phee was silent, and presently Mrs. Stirling continued—

"Chairlie an' Lizzie are fery fond of one another, and so far ass I can judge, well suited in effery way ; and it won't do them a bit or harm to begin at the bottom of the ladder and ficht their way up."

"But it seems a peety that they should haf to struggle so hard at fearst."

"Not a bit of it, Maggie ; the trouble nowa-days iss that young people want to begin where their fathers and mothers left off, and the worst of it iss that the fathers and mothers encourage them in it. When me an' you wass marriet, Maggie, how much did we haf to begin with ?"

Mrs. M'Phee smiled in spite of herself.

"To tell the truth," she said, "when Angus an' me wass marriet, we hadn't a pound between us, an' Angus was out of work at the time."

It was Mrs. Stirling's turn to smile now.

"Yess," she said, nodding, "yess, and when we landed from the *Arabian* in Portland Bay in '52 how much did we haf to begin the world with?"

Again Mrs. M'Phee smiled, and again Mrs. Stirling, after looking at her with a roguish twinkle in her eye, went on—

"Juist strong hands, fearless hearts, and our Scotch common sense, but neffer a pound in all the world to bless ourselves with; but we were not afraid to get marriet an' face life; and we did get marriet an' face life."

"We did so, Janet. Will I effer forget the nicht you wass marriet, down at the old Kangaroo station, and you went straight off after the supper to live in the boundary rider's hut, and we all went over later on for the tin kettlin', and that divil of a Hughie M'Kinnon had gone over in the afternoon and tied a bullock-bell under the bed, an' when ye went to get in——"

"Maggie, A'm surprised at you remembering such things."

"Ass if I could effer forget it. And black Allen M'Donald—he's white Allen now, puir feller—climbed up on the roof, an' put a bag over the chimney an' nearly smoked ye out. Losh me, I'll never forget it."

"No, nor me neither, Maggie ; nor the time that followed it, first on the station, and afterwards when we came down here. Up in the morning early an' at it till dark at night ; but when I look back, I thank God for it all, for it wass the happiest time of my life ; and when I look over the fairm it always gives me a bit of a lift to think that I had my share in the making of it.

"I may be wrong," she continued, "but I think it iss best for people to marry airly, an' then ficht the battle of life together ; and if they haf hardships to face they'll be better men and women in the long run. The Bible says that 'it's guid for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth,' an' it's guid for a woman, too, Maggie, but it's best of all when they bear it together. If I had to live my life again I'd live the same life over ; and A'm satisfied that it won't do Lizzie nor Chairlie one bit of haim to have a bit of a struggle at the first ; in fact it will do them a world of guid."

"But what about children, Janet? There's that to think of?"

"Weel, what about them? Maggie, ye're an auld fule; why, bless you, you've got eight yoursel'."

"I haf that"—and Mrs. M'Phee smiled proudly at the thought of her eight—"I haf that."

"Weel, I beat you, for I had ten. One of them iss—iss not, for God took her;" and the kindly eyes filled, and the sweet old voice trembled a little. However, she soon recovered herself and went on: "But the rest are all well and strong, thank God. We had a job to manage sometimes, but we were always able to feed and clothe them, and ten iss a big family. Then look at the Cooks over the river. They came here about the same time that we did, an' you remember how they always seemed afraid of a family, thinkin' they micht not be able to keep one. Weel, they had no family to speak of, only the one child, Annie; and what's the result? Are they any better off? Their land iss chjust ass guid ass ours, if not better, yet I doubt if they're ass well off ass we are to-day."

"Luik here, Maggie, I believe Gid specially blesses and prospers people who are not afraid to haf children, or at all events He always provides for them, and in the long run the parents

of large families are no worse off. Think of us and the Cooks, again ; why this last few years faither hass chjust pottered about the place doing odd things, or sat in here by the fire taking life easy, while the boys do the work and look after the fairm ; but John Cook hass to work and think ass hard ass effer he did in his life, because he hass no sons to share the burden with him.

“The Bible says, Maggie, that ‘children are a blessing from the Lord,’ an’ we know it’s true, don’t we ? I think if I had my time over again I would like to haf more children, not less, wouldn’t you ? ”

“Weel,” Mrs. M’Phee replied slowly, “I believe I would, an’ when I come to think of it, you’re richt and A’m wrong, Janet ; I’ve been talking like an auld fule. Of course Lizzie and Chairlie ’ll get along alricht, an’ I’ll give Lizzie that heifer that’s chjust come in for a weddin’ present. And who’s to marry them ? Mr. M’Candlish ? ”

“Of course. Chairlie thinks there’s nobody like Mr. M’Candlish.”

“Weel, I do think he’s a fearful nice man mysef, but he’s such a mixture ; whateffer would they do in Skeye with a minister like him ? My Roary says he’s the greatest coughdrop ever he came across ; but by all accounts it’s not only

Chairlie that thinks there's nobody like Mr. M'Candlish?" And Mrs. M'Phee looked inquiringly at Mrs. Stirling.

"Weel, Maggie, no doubt him an' Jinny iss together a great deal, an' they do seem fond of each other, but"—and there was a wistful look in Mrs. Stirling's eyes—"I doubt if anything will effer come of it, an' I tell Jinny to be careful; but you know what girls are at her age; you know what we were at her age. But you'll be over the day of the weddin'; an', Maggie, there's only one thing I could wish different apout this matter, an' that iss, that Chairlie had you for hiss mother; not that I have anything against Mrs. Black, she's a real decent boddy, but chjust for the sake of auld lang syne."

"It's ferry like you, Janet, to say that, an' I wish—— But losh me, we've got plenty more yet, an' if ass you say there's nothing much between Chjinny an' the minister, what's to prevent her an' my Roary——"

"I'd like nothing better, Maggie."

"Then it's a bargain."

"Ah weel, we're a pair of auld fules; but if ye're rested Maggie, come out now an' haf a luik at my cheekens—I've nefer had a finer lot in my life."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PARSON EXPLAINS

CHARLIE BLACK and Lizzie Stirling were married the second week in October, and as the weather was perfect and the guests many, the breakfast was laid out in the garden, under the pink-blossomed peach-trees; a happier time it has rarely been my lot to spend at a wedding, and a finer looking couple I have never seen standing before a minister.

Dick the Dasher's prophecy that Liz would get a surprise when she saw the wedding cake was amply fulfilled. He and Alex waited until all were seated and looking to M'Candlish to say grace; then they came from the house bearing between them a great meat dish, which they set down in front of the bride. The dish was full of crumbs and icing, with some crushed-up decorations, perched jauntily and somewhat drunkenly on the top.

“ In the name of goodness, A-alex, what have you got there? ”

“ The weddin’ cake.”

“ The what ? ”

“ The weddin’ cake ; carn’t yer see it ? We brought it all the way from Terang, an’ we brought it this way so as you wouldn’t ’ave the bother of cuttin’ it up ; all you’ve got ter do now is ter rake off a plateful ov pieces, an’ ’and it round, then everybody can ’ave a bit without goin’ to any trouble.”

Liz was surprised, and touched too ; and pleased and sorry, all at one and the same time. But if you should chance to call at her house, and happen to be shown into the cosy parlour that overlooks the river, in the corner by the fireplace, under a glass case on a little table, you will see carefully preserved the flower from the unfortunate wedding cake ; and if you should ask any questions Mrs. Charlie will smile and tell you its history, and finish up by saying, “ Poor A-alex, he was terribly cut up about it, though he tried to laugh it off.”

We went in a body to the train to see them away to Melbourne for their honeymoon, and never before was such a crowd upon the Timboon station as thronged it that day ; the philosophers’ school was crowded out ; the

officials had hard work to get the goods aboard the trucks ; the station was strewn thick with rice and rose leaves ; and when at last the train moved off amid tears on the part of the women and cheers on the part of the men, a great hob-nailed boot and a baby's tiny shoe were seen to be tied promiscuously to the handle of the carriage door, this parting souvenir of the goodwill of the forest being due to the tender thoughtfulness of Dick the Dasher.

When the train had gone we all returned to Stirling's to spend the evening, and notwithstanding the fact that the old people were too religious to allow dancing, what with games, singing, and supper, we contrived to pass the time very happily.

The only thing that marred our pleasure was the fact that Jinny Stirling did not seem herself ; usually she was the life and soul of every party to which she went, but all that day, and the evening too, she had gone about looking wretched and miserable.

About ten o'clock M'Candlish missed her from the room ; and going outside, found her standing in the shadow of the roses that climbed up the verandah to the roof ; she was leaning against a verandah post, thoughtlessly plucking

a rose to pieces, and letting the petals fall at her feet, at the same time looking wistfully up at the stars.

“Miss Jinny.” She started at the sound of his voice, and turned swiftly towards him.

“It’s you, Mr. M’Candlish.”

“Yes, I missed you from the room, and came out to see if I could find you. You don’t seem to be quite yourself to-night ; what’s the matter ? ”

“Oh, nothing much.”

“Is it because of Lizzie going away ? ”

“No, not exactly.”

“Well, what do you say to a walk down by the creek ? ”

“I’ll go—if you wish it.”

“Come along then ; we’ll be able to talk there without fear of interruption.”

Down by the creek they leant a while on the rail of the fence listening to the wagtails twittering in the trees and the creek tumbling over the stones.

“Miss Jinny, I want to ask you a straight question ; am I in any way the cause of your sadness to-night ? ”

Jinny was watching the moonlight dancing on the water ; she moved impatiently but made no reply.

“Well,” he said presently, “am I to take it that silence gives consent?”

Still no reply, but she turned and looked at him now with that in her eyes that made him sick at heart, but he was determined to get to a proper understanding whatever it cost, so he went on—

“If you have misunderstood me, Miss Jinny, I’m very, very sorry, for it will mean great hardship for us both, but I hope it isn’t so, indeed I don’t see how it can be, for we agreed in the very beginning that there was to be nothing but friendship in the matter; and later on, when I asked you if the friendship was doing you any harm, you said ‘No’; don’t you remember?”

There was silence between them for a time, then Jinny answered wearily—

“Yes, I remember, I remember every bit of it; but I thought somehow that things had changed, and—and—I’m afraid these last few weeks—have—have—finished—me.” And the beautiful head went down on the arms that were crossed on the rail, and she sobbed like a child.

Of all the parson felt as he listened to this artless confession it would be hard indeed to tell; but shame, grief, sympathy, pity, and sorrow, came rolling over his soul like great ocean

billows, and for a time he was too stunned to speak, then he groaned rather than said—

“May God forgive me, for I never can myself; but I did think I had made things safe for us both.”

Presently Jinny raised her head and turned to him; a ray of moonlight slipped through the foliage of the tree and rested upon her face. M'Candlish had never seen a face so beautiful as hers, and he had never before seen her look so beautiful as then—so pale, so sad, so sweet—and a great impulse came upon him to take her in his arms and commit his life to her for ever; but with an effort he restrained himself, and Jinny spoke.

“I know,” she said, “that I’m a fool to say what I’m going to say now, but my heart is breaking, and I must tell you even if I die of shame. Mr. M'Candlish, you were too nice to me, too good, too kind, and I had to love you in spite of myself. I knew I was mad to let myself go, but I couldn't help it. I can't do things by halves either, and you have taken all my life; my heart is breaking with the love I have towards you, and I can't bear it. I think perhaps if I went to some place where I could not see you, it would be easier for me, so I've made up my mind to leave the forest

altogether. I'll take a place as governess, servant, anything, but go I must, for I can't stay near you and—and control—myself any longer. So I've m—m—made——”

She bowed her head on her arms again, and her form was shaken by her sobbing, while the parson with clenched hands and a face deathly white stood in an agony, trying to think what he ought to do.

“Why should I break her heart?” he reasoned. “Why not marry her? She's all that any minister could wish for; everybody loves her. I have never met any one whom I have loved half so well. Possibly after all this ‘God's woman’ of mine is only, as Mr. Watson says, a ‘dream woman,’ a mere creation of my fancy. Why should I go on waiting for her? Why should I break a real woman's heart for the sake of a shadow?”

A thousand such thoughts rushed through the parson's mind in less time than it takes me to tell of them; and they weighed with him too, for presently he placed his hand on Jinny's shoulder as she leant upon the fence, and said gently but steadily—

“Don't cry, Jinny, and don't do anything in a hurry. Let us pray about the matter, and think it over for a week; the way may be clearer then.”

Something in his voice made her raise her head and look at him inquiringly ; it did not take her long to read his thoughts, and a great, glad hope came dancing gleefully into her heart.

“ I’m not sure,” he said, in answer to her unspoken question. “ I don’t know what to say ; I want time to think. We must not rush things, but we’ll pray about it, and perhaps—— ”

They stood a moment in silence looking into each other’s eyes, and while they were looking their hearts got the better of their heads. He placed his hands on her shoulders.

She raised her face to his—that beautiful face set so fairily well in the casket of her wonderful hair. The old mischievous light came joyously into her eyes, the lips parted in a merry smile, the upper one curling away comically from the milky white teeth ; and as the minister looked into the fathomless depths of that womanly loveliness he was overcome with a dizziness to which all men are liable, and losing his balance he fell. The parson became as other men—other young men—and in that fatal moment he did that which any young man was sure to do—and no harm thought—but which a minister, no matter how young, may never do, under

pain of ruination ; he obeyed the apostolic injunction ; he treated the younger woman as a sister—he kissed her on the lips.

“ You find it pleasanter outside than in.”

It was old Mr. Stirling passing within three yards of them on his way to the creek to water a horse. The shock of the surprise was so great that the parson felt as though he had suddenly been stricken with paralysis, but recovering himself instantly, he said—

“ That settles it. I’ll go and talk to your father now.”

But Jinny clung to his arm.

“ No,” she said, “ not to-night.”

“ Why not ? ”

She couldn’t tell why, but she said again—

“ Not to-night.”

So opportunity, wing-footed, sped by and came no more ; and old Mr. Stirling, believing M’Candlish to be merely playing with his daughter, returned inside, and in the bitterness of his spirit wrote a letter to the Home Mission Committee, which was fraught with consequences he little dreamed of.

CHAPTER XXX

“AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS”

FOR a week M'Candlish prayed and thought as he had never done in his life before. The burden of his prayer was that he might be guided aright in regard to Jinny Stirling, and the Thursday night following the wedding he came to the parting of the ways. One way he must take, and immediately ; but which ?

When he looked along that to the left it seemed dark and empty. A mist hung over it so that he could not see far nor clearly ; and where it led he could not tell, only he knew if he took it he must fare forth alone.

When he turned his eyes to look the other way there was Jinny Stirling waiting to bear him company, Jinny in all her radiant beauty, smiling and cheerful as of yore, and a look in her eyes which entreated him to come.

Beyond her in the distance, faint yet distinct, he caught glimpses of a cottage with roses

at the door, and chubby-faced, curly-headed children playing on the lawn in front, Jinny's children—hair like Jinny's, eyes like Jinny's, little comical mouths just like Jinny's. And as he looked and longed a woman came out and stood at the cottage door, and lo, it was Jinny herself, but an improved Jinny, her form fuller, rounder, more womanly, for the lines of her girlish figure had been touched and softened into perfection by the magic touch of motherhood.

And Jinny is looking expectantly down the pathway, and as she looks a glad light floods her face. She claps her hands, and with that exquisite trill of the r's and broadening of the a's that the Colonial-born children of the Scottish highlanders sometimes possess she cries—

“Father's coming! R-run, children! r-run, A-alec! r-run Babbie, Toby, Jean; r-run, r-run!”

And with glad shouts up rose those sturdy toddlers, all steps and stairs, and all so like their mother, and scampered down the pathway to their father.

And the father? But the vision fades there, and try as he will, the parson cannot clearly make him out. At one time he resembles Rory

McPhee, and M'Candlish is conscious of a tide of jealousy sweeping over him. At another time it is M'Candlish himself, and at that a deep peace and contentment comes upon him.

Then the vision faded altogether, and the parson turned again to look along the lonely road. And this man, like others I have known, was always tempted to believe that the hard way must of necessity be the right way, and God's way. He faced it sadly but resolutely.

If he were sure that it was God's way he would take it at all costs.

"He always wins who sides with God,"

he told himself. And somewhere along that way he would find God's woman, and he would live to thank God that he hadn't married Jinny Stirling. And as he thus reasoned, the words of Solomon's Song began to beat in upon his consciousness like the incessant ringing of a warning bell, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the harts, that ye stir not up nor awaken love until it please."

He must not compel himself to love Jinny Stirling; indeed, he could not compel himself to love Jinny or another, "For," said he, "Love alone is lord; I am but Love's slave. I cannot say to Love 'Lo here,' or 'Lo there'; Love

goes where Love pleases. I cannot give Love to Jinny, Love is not mine to give ; I am Love's to give, and some day Love will take me up in the arms that are stronger than Death and bear me to the chosen one as easily and naturally as a strong river bears a leaf on its bosom to the sea." And a voice would seem to say, "This lonely way is the way, walk ye in it," and M'Candlish had almost decided to do so when another voice broke in and cried, "But is it the way? God's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace. Are you sure this is the right way?"

Then high above these voices and the clamour of Solomon's warning bell came the silvery laughter of Jinny's children, and M'Candlish turned swiftly to see again the vision I have described. Poor M'Candlish, Puridan's ass standing between the two bundles of hay was not more perplexed than he.

But at last another voice is heard, still and small at first, but with ever-increasing volume, until all other sounds are hushed by its strident tones ; and the new voice demands to know by what name this yearning in his heart after Jinny and her children is to be called. Is not this what men call love?

As the thought took shape the soul of the missionary quickened within him. "Could it be that this was really love? and could it be that this ever-increasing hunger within was just the cry of his soul for its mate?" The thought thrilled him through and through, and he rose from the bed where he had lain tossing and gave himself to prayer.

After he had prayed some time his judgment and reason emerged from the mist, and a conviction came to him; not all at once, but gradually, like the phantom-ship to the perishing seamen—

"At first it seemed a little speck,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist."

And the shape that it finally took was the absolute certainty that Jinny Stirling was God's woman, and the one for whom he had sought so long.

The conviction so overwhelmed him with strange happiness that to pray any longer was impossible. He rose from his knees and went out into the little front garden, and there he paced up and down for the remainder of the night. And with every hour the happiness

increased within, until it seemed to him at last as though the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God were shouting for joy.

It was so clear now that he marvelled greatly how he had failed to see it at the first. He had boasted that he would know God's woman when she came, and lo, she came; but alas! for his boast! For months past he had been in closest contact with her, touching her hands, hearing her speak, looking into her very eyes, and yet he had not known her. Oh, M'Candlish! where were your eyes and understanding?

He thought of those two disciples who on the resurrection day had walked with Jesus all the way to Emmaus, aye, and talked with Him too, yet never once suspected Him to be the Lord, because their eyes were holden that they should not see. How closely holden must his eyes have been!

And again, he thought of the Jews who were looking for a Messiah to be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, and finding Him instead in a cattle-stall, had passed by on the other side, nor deemed Him worthy of a thought. He, too, though he scarcely knew it, had looked to see God's woman coming in the clouds of the sky; and because she had come on a forest

track, riding a chestnut horse, he had scarcely more than glanced at her.

Some day we shall learn that the commonplace and the everyday is nearest of all to the heart of the Divine, and when we do, instead of standing like the men of Galilee looking up into heaven, we shall look more closely at the earth, and find to our amazement and delight that the most familiar things are all aflame with God, and heaven's richest gifts are close at hand.

When M'Candlish returned to his room absolute certainty had come to him; once more he was his own man, and his course was clear. Also with certainty there came rolling over him again those waves of holy calm and rapturous exaltation, like a sea of glass mingled with fire, which he remembered to have experienced the night of his conversion.

The day was dawning when he fell asleep, and when he awoke the sun was shining in his window, the magpies were warbling, and a thousand lesser birds twittered and sang in the cool morning air. That rapturous peace was still in his heart, and for a time he lay almost afraid to move, lest he should disturb it; but at length he arose, and after breakfast strolled out and away from the house.

CHAPTER XXXI

“ALL IN A GARDEN FAIR”

IT was quite an ordinary spring day—that is if spring days are ever ordinary; it was Friday too, and Friday is an unlucky day, if one may believe the sailors' and the old wives' tales. But the change within M'Candlish was so great that it had affected everything around him, and that work-a-day Friday seemed like a Sunday, and the wide-spreading forest bathed in soft sunshine another Garden of Eden in which the Lord God walked.

Up in the scrub beyond the orchard fence, hidden away behind innumerable twigs and leaves, so that no passer-by could ever detect them, were millions of locusts, all of them provided with a kind of one-stringed fiddle, located in the hinder part of their anatomy; and standing with bodies sloping, head downward at an angle of forty-five degrees, and

rasping away on the fiddle with their back legs, they contrived to produce such a volume of harsh music as would have fairly distracted one not accustomed to it.

M'Candlish had some thought of a walk through the scrub, but hearing from afar the strenuous concert of these tiny fiddlers, he turned aside and went into the orchard. There were times when he would have been interested mightily, but to-day he was listening to a new and wondrous music in his own awakening heart, and longed for quietness that he might hear it perfectly.

In the orchard he stretched himself at full length upon a little green bank near the creek, where the tall and military-looking cocksfoot grass, standing in close battalions and rigidly as soldiers on review, hemmed him in on all sides, while the nodding clover, grey-headed and civilian-like, peered inquisitively between their files, and bowed to him obsequiously with every passing breeze.

Above and around him the sober-minded bees drove hard bargains with the blossoms for honey, and having extorted from them as much as they could carry, would lumber heavily off into the forest to one or other of the great bee cities.

In sharp distinction to these hard-working, brown-coated people were the butterflies, whose gorgeous clothing and frivolous manner of life mark them out as the society people of their world. They flitted hither and thither, and posed and swayed and trifled with the flowers just as the fine ladies of both sexes do about the shop windows, the tea-rooms, and the streets, thereby earning for themselves the undisguised contempt of every sweating artisan and serious man of business who may chance to pass them by. And you may be sure these giddy butterflies are not less despised in their world by the bees.

Yet the master mind in the orchard that day, in the person of M'Candlish, looked tenderly and lovingly at the pretty useless things; in his present mood they pleased him well. And it is just possible that in some such way the Master Mind of the Universe,

“The great God who made and loveth all,”

may see even in the gilded butterflies of fashion, mincing in the streets, something that affords Him pleasure. Let us hope so, any way.

The newest reformer would banish them from the face of the earth, but I greatly question whether the face of the earth would be a more agreeable place to live upon if the reformer had his way. It goes without saying that if we closed our streets to these sunshine people, and filled their places with Quakers and their wives, our cities would be extremely respectable and safe, but on the other hand they would be infinitely duller and more sad, just as the orchard would lose half its brightness were the butterflies to go and leave it to the bees.

And after all there is no great harm in a butterfly, but as for a bee!—well, he is always more or less of an uncertain quantity, and he is such a thorough stickler for his Munroe doctrine, and pursues his policy of Bee Land (which is Honey Land) for the bees, with such persistent jealousy and ill-temper, that while many people respect him for his industry, many more resent his conservatism and irascibility, and everybody gives him as wide a berth as possible. So I conclude that while the bees of both worlds are the more useful and necessary, the butterflies are not to be despised.

M'Candlish, at all events, was in no mood

that day to despise anything that the Lord God had created and made. All gave him pleasure, and his eyes wandering from the butterflies to the bees, and thence to the blossoms, presently mounted higher yet, and rested upon the snowy clouds. How pure they were! He could find no trace of defilement on any one, though he scan them never so closely. There had been times in his life when their very purity would have made him miserable, for he would have fallen to contrasting them with the sinfulness of his own heart, but to-day he felt strangely in accord with their whiteness.

It seemed to him as though he had recently gone through some great purifying process, and had come out sweet and clean, and he was very near to the truth, for excepting only the cleansing fire of God's Spirit, there is no power on earth so purifying as the love which rises in a man's heart at the call of a good, true woman.

There is love and love, I know, and there is a love which is only lust, but true love is clear and pure as the river of the water of life, of which indeed it is a tributary, and when it flows through a man's life it so cleanses, sweetens, and regenerates him that

his flesh comes again like the flesh of a little child, and he is clean.

And if woman only knew in her day how truly she becomes as God to a man in the sweet beginnings of his love for her, then, like Mary, bowed down with the sense of her privilege and responsibility, she would betake herself to prayer and holy living, and who could doubt the result? But the average woman, like the city of old, knows not the things which belong to her peace. The hour of her visitation goes by unnoticed. Love bears the cross outside the gates and is crucified, and her house is left unto her desolate. Indifference, like the Romans, comes upon her, digs a trench about her, casts a bank against her, and of that fair temple of her happiness there is not left one stone upon another.

It was well for M'Candlish that he loved a woman who had first loved God, and whose prayer to God had been that except their coming together would work for His glory, it might never be. And could Jinny Stirling have looked into M'Candlish's heart that day and seen the purity that had come to him through love, she would also have seen of the travail of her soul—and been satisfied.

And all the morning M'Candlish lay amid the cocksfoot and clover, with the fiddling of the locusts, the hum of the bees, the songs of birds, and the patter of the creek in his ears. And all the morning he built white castles in the sailing clouds, and in every castle Jinny Stirling sat as queen. And Jinny's children were running through the rooms like sunbeams, and the music of their voices filled the halls. And Love alone was lord. Sorrow and sighing had fled away, for doubt was swallowed up in certainty.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BREAKDOWN AT TIMBOON

IT was unusual for me to go to the night service at Timboon ; not through any lack of inclination, but because it was well-nigh impossible for me to do so ; for not only were we a considerable distance away from the hall, but there was the Brucknell service in the afternoon, the cows to milk when we returned home, then tea to get, and by that time it was too late to think of going anywhere. However, M'Candlish had announced a special service for young men, to be held the Sunday following the wedding, and it happened that on that particular day we managed to get through our work much quicker than usual, so I had an early tea, and afterwards saddled a horse and rode over to the service, and was glad ever afterwards that I did.

The hall was full of people, and a clear

majority of them were young men. I chose a seat near the door and sat down, and immediately the feeling came upon me that something was about to happen ; the very atmosphere of the place seemed to be charged with reverence and Divine power ; an unusual stillness prevailed, and the consciousness of the near presence of God seemed to dominate all hearts. In the words of Jacob, I said within myself, " Surely God is in this place," and He was.

When M'Candlish came in from the ante-room he looked pale and distressed, and in all that he did there was a deeper note of earnestness and reverence than I had ever known him to strike before ; this was very noticeable when he prayed for the young men : it was more the prayer of a father for his boys than that of one young man praying for his brothers ; his voice was full of tears.

The text was from the Book of Ecclesiastes, eleventh chapter, ninth verse, and read, " Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight or thine eyes : but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

We none of us knew that it was the last sermon we were to hear him preach, but he did,

and the consciousness that it was the only opportunity now left him to lead these young fellows into the paths of safety, weighed heavily upon him, and made him desperately in earnest for their souls' salvation. In one sense I had never heard him preach a worse sermon, and in another I had never heard him preach a better. There was none of the swinging eloquence that usually characterised his preaching ; none of those revelations of hidden truths in familiar texts that made his sermons so fresh and wonderful ; none of those striking contrasts that made one truth stand out so vividly against another ; none of those exquisite word-pictures that he excelled in painting ; but there was a deep moving tenderness and solemnity that was infinitely more impressive than them all.

The simplest words he spoke seemed to stagger under the weight of their meaning and become as it were the oracles of God ; and looking round I saw on all sides the fulfilment of the words, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Victory was with the Lord and His people that night, but it came, not by the might of gifted reasoning, not by the power of golden oratory, but by the all-persuasive soul-subduing power of the Holy Spirit.

Humanly speaking, I suppose no one was better fitted to speak about the temptations of a young man's life than M'Candlish : he knew them all, he had been through them all ; and though he spoke so simply, yet he spoke as one having authority ; and not only so, but in that he had suffered being tried, he was able to succour those that were in like case, for he had been tried in all points like as they were, and not without sin ; and because he had known the misery of the yoke of sin, he was filled with a great sympathy for all who bore it ; and in the long run, sympathy, plainly expressed, will do more to win the heart of the average man than all the thunders of hell.

I do not say that the preaching of hell is a mistake, quite the contrary, for some people never could be saved by any other kind of preaching, but in a general way sympathy will be found the more effective of the two.

M'Candlish talked of the confidence and impetuosity of youth ; he talked of temptation ; the subtle nature and power of sin ; the consequences of sin in this life and the next ; and of the power of God to save. On this last point he worked a good deal on his own experience ; he told the story of his conversion with thrilling effect, and overcame his hearers by the

word of his testimony and the blood of the Lamb.

The whole congregation was melted and broken down, and I saw tears in the eyes of men whom I had believed to be beyond the reach of any softening influence, and I learned again what I am ever learning and forgetting, that—

“Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore :
Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.”

No one was more deeply impressed than Mr. Bill M'Guire, Master of the Ceremonies. I kept my eyes on him throughout the service, and when it was over and the parson came down to shake hands with the people as they passed out I whispered him to speak to Bill. The Master of the Ceremonies came staggering down the aisle the picture of despair.

“Good-night, Mr. M'Candlish,” he said, extending his hand. The parson took it in his, and said—

“Wouldn't you like to come into the ante-room and have a talk about things?”

Bill said nothing, but he signified his assent,

and the two went into the ante-room together. At that moment Alex Black passed me by on his way out ; his face was so full of misery that I pitied him. "Alex," I said, stepping after him, "you had better come with me." He needed no persuading, but came at once.

In the ante-room we found the Master of Ceremonies and the parson on their knees, and knelt beside them. Scarcely had we done so when the door opened, and Long Jack Smith pushed Stringy-bark Paterson into the room. "'E wanted ter come," he said, "but 'e 'adn't the pluck, so I brought 'im." There was a rustle of skirts, and I found Jemima White kneeling beside me, crying bitterly.

At that M'Candlish stood up and whispered to me—

"We must make the most of this ; sing 'There is a fountain,' and keep it going, while I go out and see if I can get hold of any others."

Presently like some strong swimmer rescuing souls from a wreck, he returned, bringing two young fellows with him.

"Where's Dick ?" I whispered ; "he ought to be here."

"Won't come," he replied, "but he's greatly troubled, and I think he'll be all right." Then he went out again, and in his absence Miss

Westbrook came in with two of her Sunday-school scholars.

When the parson returned the next time my heart almost stood still when I saw at his side no less a person than old Ulysses. Others came, or were brought, young men mostly, until the room was well-nigh full, and each as he came knelt down to pray.

When they had made an end of coming, M'Candlish asked all to rise to their feet, and then he told them gently and tenderly that the only thing they could do was to give themselves up to God, body, soul, and spirit, to be His alone for ever; praying for the forgiveness of their sins and the witness of the Holy Spirit.

Then we knelt down again, and each in his own heart settled the matter with God. The parson went wherever he was needed, giving advice and encouragement, and about eleven o'clock the most fearful and unbelieving seemed thoroughly satisfied; so we joined hands and sang the Doxology, and when that was finished, M'Candlish prayed that God would take all who had just given their lives to Him into His safe keeping, and lead them up the hill and down the hill of life and through the pearly gates.

Outside the hall we said "Good-night," and went back to our homes with a new song in our mouths, even praise to our God.

I had intended going along with the parson, but when I saw that Dick the Dasher was waiting for him I thought it best to leave them together and went off alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DICK THE DASHER

WHEN the service was over, Dick the Dasher and the parson came home together, and after they had got inside, Dick sat by the fire for a few minutes staring fixedly into it, then with a great sigh he rose to his feet and went away to bed.

Shortly after Dick had gone, M'Candlish went to his room, and having read the portion for that evening in the "Daily Light," he knelt down and prayed with great earnestness that God would bless with a mighty blessing all the young men, but especially was he led to pray for Dick the Dasher ; then he undressed himself and went to bed—but not to sleep, for no sooner had he lain down than the conviction came upon him that he had made a fearful blunder in not having had a straight talk to Dick on the way home. It was evident that

Dick was deeply concerned, and as M'Candlish thought things over it seemed to him that it was little short of madness to let such an opportunity go by.

This feeling so grew upon him, that at last he sprang out of bed, and partly dressing himself, went quietly down the passage to the Dasher's room. The fire was burning low and red in the dining-room as he passed by, and in its dull glow he came to Dick's door and whispered—

“Asleep, Dick?”

“Wish I wos,” Dick growled from under the clothes.

The parson stole into the room and sat on the side of the bed.

“Don't you feel like sleep, Dick?”

“I feel about as much like sleep as I feel like joinin' a menagerie.”

“Why, what's up with you?”

“It seems as though it's all up with me.”

“Dick, you're anxious about your soul, aren't you?”

“Well, wot about it?”

“Would you like very much to be a Christian, Dick?”

“I told yer long ago I'd give the world ter be a Christian.”

“ Well, will you put on your things and come into my room ? ”

Dick hesitated. “ I don’t think I’d better,” he said.

“ Why not ? ”

“ Oh, well, the Watsons mightn’t like it—it wouldn’t do,” he added, after a pause.

And herein is a marvellous thing, Dick the Dasher was quite willing to give the whole world to be a Christian, but he was not willing to risk disturbing some one who was asleep, although he knew perfectly well that the one would gladly have surrendered a month’s sleep to have seen him converted to God.

The fact is that when it came to the actual point Dick hadn’t the moral courage to take the step, and was eager to find some excuse for not doing so ; and although he knew it not, he was endeavouring to deceive the parson and his own soul at the same time.

In this matter Dick is not alone ; there are thousands of people who delude themselves into the belief that they are willing to pay the most extravagant prices if only they may lead better lives, but when the time comes for the payment to be made, be it but—figuratively speaking—a brass farthing, it seems altogether beyond their means. How strange it is that we are all so eager to cheat ourselves !

But M'Candlish knew how to handle Dick, so he said, "Just now, Dick, you were willing to give the whole world to be a Christian, but when it comes to the point you're not willing to do a little thing such as I've asked you. What kind of a fellow are you?" Dick the Dasher rose and flung the clothes to the other end of the bed.

"That's the kind of feller I am," he said, "I'm comin'."

While he was getting his things on the parson stood by the door praying, and presently in their bare feet they crept along the passage and into M'Candlish's bedroom. Arrived there, they stood with white, set faces, silently looking into each other's eyes; the hour had come, and both men knew it. The parson broke the silence.

"Well, what about it, are you going to see it through?" Dick's jaws set in firm resolve as he answered—

"Yas, I am."

"Come on, then." The missionary went down on his knees beside the bed; and instantly Dick the Dasher knelt beside him. There was silence for a little time, though both men were praying earnestly; then the parson said—

“There’s nothing for it, Dick, but to do as I did, give yourself body and soul to God, and trust in Him to do the rest. Will you do that?”

“Yas, I’ll do w’otever you tell me.”

“Will you do it now?”

“Yas, now.”

“You know that old hymn, ‘Just as I am,’ don’t you?”

Dick signified assent.

“Well, we’ll repeat it together, and you just make it your prayer to God.”

And then and there, in that sleeping house, with all the strength of his strong, fervent soul, Dick the Dasher made his prayer unto the God of his life, in the words of that beautiful hymn—

“Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come !

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come !

Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down ;—
Now to be Thine, yea Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come !”

When they had repeated the hymn they continued for some time on their knees in silent prayer ; and when at last they rose to their feet, M'Candlish was almost startled by the change in his friend, for Dick the Dasher was transfigured before him, and although his raiment was not white and glistening, his face shone with the light of God, and into the deeps of his blue eyes there had come that calm, beautiful expression seen only in the eyes of those in whose hearts is the peace of God which passeth understanding. To the missionary he seemed like one who had been bathed and anointed with fresh oil.

In that hour Dick the Dasher was born again, born, not of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God ; born a second time, unto salvation ; and as he had in times past borne the image of the earthy, now he bore the image of the heavenly ; and so unmistakably that M'Candlish was astonished : he had never seen it on this wise ; and as he looked he said slowly and in awed tones—

“ Praise God ! praise God ! ” and then, “ There's no need to ask if it's all right, Dick.”

“ No,” said Dick, “ there's no need to ask ; it's all right, Mr. M'Candlish.”

“No doubts?”

“Not one.”

“Satisfied?”

“Yes, I’m satisfied at last : the hungry feelin’ at my heart is gone. I’m converted if ever anybody wos. Praise God ! praise God !” After a time he added, “I think I’d like ter go ter my room now, an’ be alone for a bit ;” but as they stood together, hand clasped in hand, his face suddenly changed, the rapt expression left it, the lips quivered, the eyes filled, and crying brokenly, “If mother had only lived ter see this !” he flung himself face down on the bed in a paroxysm of weeping. The fountains of the great deep had broken up.

For a long time he lay there sobbing, and M’Candlish was too wise to disturb him, but at last he knelt by his side and said—

“You must go to your room now, Dick, but before you do we’ll both consecrate our lives to the service of God. Let us pray that prayer in the hymn that Lochart Morton was so fond of.” Dick gladly assented, and together they repeated the words—

“Just as I am, young, strong, and free,
To be the best that I can be,
For truth and righteousness and Thee,
Lord of my life, I come !”

They rose up with hearts melted and aglow, and eyes filled with tears, and stood a moment looking into each other's faces ; then the parson, seized by irresistible impulse, took Dick's face in both his hands, and kissed him.

When Dick had gone to his room, M'Candlish turned the light down, and drawing back the window blinds, stood a while looking out towards the east, where the first crimson streaks of colour were just beginning to climb the sky, heralding the dawning of a new day and the uprising of the glorious sun ; "Fit emblem," thought the missionary, "of the dawning of the new day in the life of Dick the Dasher, and the shining into his dark heart of the Sun of Righteousness, risen to set no more."

And right up the valley of the river, in the stillness that held all else, came the distant thunder of the waves breaking on the Peterborough coast, telling of the incoming sweep of the flood-tide. And as M'Candlish listened to the voice of their roaring he prayed that even so, like the sea in flood at spring-tide, might the deep, strong love of God come into the life of Dick the Dasher ; covering all his desires, washing out all his cares, drowning all his sins, lifting up his poor earth-bound soul, and float-

ing him to the feet of Jesus, to abide there for ever.

Later on, when he had risen and breakfasted, he strolled across the paddock to a hill overlooking the river flat, that he might drink in some of the delicious sweetness of the morning air, and also decide upon a course of action in the immediate future.

Down in the valley by the river some one was felling a tree, and each stroke of the axe rang out crisply and clearly, and echoed back amongst the hills. M'Candlish paused to listen, and as he did so the chopping ceased, and in its place there came floating up the hillside the words of a song, sung in a deep musical voice—

“ Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth beneath is sweeter green,
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen ;
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Flowers with richer beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know,
I am His, and He is mine.

His for ever only His ;
Who the Lord and me shall part ?
Ah, with what a wealth of bliss,
Christ can fill the longing heart !

Heaven and earth may fade and flee,
First-born light in gloom decline,
But while God and I shall be,
I am His, and He is mine."

The song ceased, and the chopping began again, but the heart of the missionary was dancing with joy, for the voice was the voice of Dick the Dasher, and the song was one that M'Candlish loved, and had sung so persistently about the house, that we all had got to know it. With beaming face he hastened to the verge of the hill, and looking down upon the singer, called out—

"It's all right, Dick?" And up from the valley Dick the Dasher shouted back—

"It's all right, Mr. M'Candlish, it's all right."

CHAPTER XXXIV

"THE BOLT FROM THE BLUE"

THE morning after the breakdown at Timboon and the conversion of Dick the Dasher I had to rise very early and ride off into the forest looking for cattle. I returned to the yards about lunch-time, bringing the mob with me, but, being very eager to have a talk with the parson about the doings of the preceding night, I hurriedly fastened the slip-rails and made my way to the house and to his room.

"Come in," he shouted in response to my knock. I made my way in, and was amazed to find him standing in the midst of a pile of books and clothes, busily packing his boxes.

"What on earth are you doing?"

"Packing up."

"Packing up?"

"Yes."

“ But why ? ”

“ I’m going away to-morrow.”

“ Going away ! ”

“ Yes.”

“ Look here, old man,” I said, “ you mustn’t joke like that, it makes me feel bad.”

“ It’s no joke, Mr. Watson ; I’m going to leave the forest to-morrow, and for ever.”

At first I could scarcely believe my ears, but I saw by his face that he was in downright earnest, and I knew him sufficiently then to know that when he said a thing he meant it. I sat down in a chair, completely overcome.

“ Isn’t this very sudden ? ”

“ Yes, it is a bit sudden—I didn’t know myself until Saturday night ; but read that,” he said, pointing to a letter on the table. I took it up and opened it, wondering. It was written on the official paper of the Home Mission Committee, and read thus :—

“ *Rev. Robert M’Candlish.*

“ DEAR SIR,—We have received a letter from one of the oldest and most trusted members in the forest, containing a very serious charge against you. The writer alleges that your manner of conducting yourself with the

younger women of the Church is the talk of the place, and is rapidly becoming a grave scandal. I need scarcely say how very disappointed we were on reading this letter ; we had expected better things of you, and reports of your work were hitherto so cheering. We are quite prepared to hear that there is another side to the matter, and should you demand an inquiry, we will grant you one ; but at the same time the Committee would much prefer that you waived your right, and for the following reasons :—

“ In the first place, an inquiry would probably split the Church into two parties ; secondly, it would stir up a great amount of ill-feeling ; and, finally, it would undo all the good that you have accomplished.

“ For these reasons we recommend that you leave quietly and at once, and providing you do so we are willing to give you another chance. There is a vacancy just now in the Mallee, and it is suggested that you take up the work there.

“ The Committee wish you to come at once to Melbourne and meet the Superintendent and Secretary at the Committee Rooms at 3 p.m. next Wednesday, when you will receive further instructions.

"Trusting you will see your way clear to fall in with our suggestions,

"I am,

"Yours sincerely,

"C. W. SAUNDERS,

"Secretary.

"PS.—Anticipating your withdrawal, I have arranged with J. G. Sinclair, who has just returned from his furlough, to take up the work in the forest Sunday week."

"Well, what do you think of it?" M'Candlish asked when I had finished reading.

"What do I think of it? I think it's a lot of—of—tommy rot. There has been some talk, certainly; but talk is one thing, scandal another. Some one—though who I can't think for the life of me—has wilfully lied. And as for the Committee and Secretary, and their cool request that you withdraw without an inquiry, it's like their cheek; we'll see them hanged first. Surely you're not weak enough, or fool enough, to go without a fight for it."

M'Candlish smiled grimly.

"People don't usually take me for weak, or a fool either," he replied; "but at the same time I'm going to adopt the suggestion of the Committee. I'm *not* going to fight, and I *am*

going to get out of the forest as quickly and quietly as I can."

"Then you are both weak and a fool."

"Well," he remarked, with a shrug of his brawny shoulders, "it's a free country, and every man is entitled to his opinion." And with that he turned to and went on with his packing.

"But," said I after a pause, "who was the writer of the letter?"

"Whom do you suppose?"

I racked my brains in vain. "It beats me," I said; "I can't think of a man in the forest who would do it, especially a man who could be described as one of the oldest and most trusted members. Have you any idea?"

"I've more than an idea; I know."

"You do?"

"Yes." I looked into his face expectantly.

"It was written by old Mr. Stirling."

"Stirling!"

"Yes, Stirling."

"Oh, I don't think that. Mr. Stirling has such a high opinion of you. Why, it's scarcely a month since I heard him say that——"

"Yes, I know," M'Candlish broke in; "but much may happen in a month, and Mr. Stirling has lately got it into his head that I've been playing with Jinny."

Then he went on to tell me of all that had happened the night of the wedding, looking, it must be confessed, somewhat sheepish as he described the kissing under the wattles and the unexpected appearance of Jinny's father. He finished by saying—

“The Secretary's letter came Saturday, and I guessed pretty well who had made the complaint, so I called at Stirling's last night on my way to the service at Timboon. Mr. Stirling was at the stable when I rode up, and as nobody else was about, I got off ‘Tommy’ and tackled him straight away. Possibly I was not too choice in the things I said to him, but anyhow he flew into an awful passion, and, as you know, when a Highlander lets himself go he's an awkward man to deal with. He shut me up and began himself, and it didn't take him long to tell me what he thought of me as a man and a minister, and it wasn't pleasant hearing, I can tell you. I can't repeat his exact words, but he finished up by saying that as long as I was in the Church neither he nor any of his would ever darken its doors. He called me all the hypocrites he could lay his tongue to. He said he would publish my infamy throughout the forest, and finally ordered me off the place, adding that if ever I put foot on it again he would set the dogs on me.”

"But didn't you explain things to him?"

"I tried hard enough, but I might as well have tried to dam Curdie's river with my hand. He had thoroughly made up his mind that I was only playing with his daughter, and would hear nothing to the contrary. I told him I meant to marry Jinny, but that only seemed to make him worse, for he said that he would rather see her in hell, and there the matter stands. The mischief is done, and can't be undone, so I'm going to adopt the Committee's suggestion and leave as quietly as I can."

"But, Mr. M'Candlish," I urged, "we can't let you go away in this fashion. Why, man, things are moving up everywhere. Think of the service last night, think of all those young fellows that came out: who's going to look after them if you go away? Why——"

"Yes," he broke in bitterly, "think of it—think of it—as though I could do anything else but think of it. But that's always the way—one hasty man acts the fool, and then a host of innocent people have to pay the penalty."

"Well," said I, "if old Stirling has acted the fool, there is no need for you to imitate him, which you certainly will do if you go away without an inquiry, nor is it fair that you should pay the penalty of his folly. You leave

it to me, and if I don't make him sit up, and swallow his words, my name isn't Watson."

M'Candlish looked at me in his lack-lustre way.

"You'll just leave matters where they are," he said quietly. "If you don't you're no friend of mine."

"Why?" I demanded impatiently.

"Well," he replied, "apart altogether from the harm it would do the work and the fact that Mr. Stirling is Jinny's father, there is this, somehow—and God knows how, I don't—but somehow I've managed to get a grip on the hearts of these forest people, and you'll agree with me that if the fellows got to know that Mr. Stirling was at the root of this trouble they'd give him a dog's life for many a day to come. But any way he is an old man, and a good man at heart, and a thing of this kind would not only fill his last days with sorrow, but in all probability shorten them, and then I could never forgive myself."

"But, Mr. M'Candlish, are you—your work, character, prospects—all to be sacrificed to save a pig-headed old fool of a man, who ought to have more sense? Why, man, you're a minister——"

"That's just it," he interrupted. "I'm a minister, a minister of the Gospel, and a

shepherd of Christ's sheep, of whom Mr. Stirling is one ; and the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. If I were something else, it might be different, and I might act differently, but being, as you say, a minister, one course only is open to me, and that is the course I am taking.

“The first minister of this Gospel didn't mind sacrificing his character and prospects, nor his life either, in order to save the flock of God, and why should I? And in the end it amounts simply to this—I must either sacrifice myself to save this man and the work of God here, or I must sacrifice the man and the work to save myself, and how could I retain my self-respect if I were to sacrifice God's work and a feeble old man to save my own skin? I couldn't do it.” He paused a moment in thought, then said slowly and impressively, “There comes a time in the life of every true man when, like Jesus of Nazareth, he may save others but himself he cannot save. That time has come to me.”

I could give no reply to this, and silence fell upon us both, he going on with his packing and I thinking over his words. At length I said, “What are you going to do about Jinny?”

M'Candlish paused in his work and leant reflectively against the mantelpiece.

"That's the worst feature of all," he said ; "and to make matters worse still, Jinny is away from home, and I won't be able to see her before I go. I can only write and tell her, and writing at best is a cold and unsatisfactory business. I hate leaving her, but what can I do ? She can't marry me without her father's consent, and it's not very likely that he'll give it just now, so I'll not trouble to ask him, but I'll ask him fast enough when Jinny comes of age."

"Suppose he refuses then ?"

The big missionary laughed a laugh that was good to hear.

"If he refuses ! Well, I'll just come over here like another young Lochinvar and take her away from under his nose." And as I looked at his sinewy frame and strong face I had no doubt but that he would be as good as his words.

"Then how about your prospects in the Church ? This will be a severe blow for you."

"Yes," he admitted, "it will, and I'll have a hard row to hoe now in order to regain their confidence ; still, I'll do it. No man is ever beaten until he begins to be afraid, and at present I'm a long way from that, and I'll win through if it takes me a lifetime. This helped me to-day," he added, lifting a copy of Tennyson that was lying open on the table and

pointing to a passage that was heavily underlined. It was great Lancelot's rebuke to Lynette when she was upbraiding young Gareth for being overthrown in fight, and read thus—

“Oh, damsel, be you wise
To call him shamed who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, not once but many a time.
Victor from vanquished issues at the last,
And overthrower through being overthrown.”

“God grant it may be so in your case,” I said fervently when I had read it through.

“Amen to that,” said he; then went on thoughtfully, “I've had a tremendous fall here beyond a doubt, and it came like thunder from a clear sky, too, as the great crises of our lives always do come; but if by this overthrow I learn to be an overthrower in the future, the knowledge will not have been too dearly bought. One other thing I have learnt,” he added, with the likeness of a smile upon his face, “and it's this, that when Paul advised treating the younger women as sisters, he didn't know what he was talking about, for experience has taught me that if an unmarried disengaged young minister wants to keep out of trouble he must shun the younger women of his congregation as he would shun the devil.”

CHAPTER XXXV

“FAREWELL TO CURDIE’S RIVER”

ONE of the quaintest of old writers tells of a certain general whose appearance and manner were always so exactly the opposite of his circumstances that when returning from a defeat, he would carry himself so gaily and joyously that all beholders supposed him to have won a great victory, and on the other hand, when returning after a victory he would wear such an appearance of misery and dejection that they were led to think he had been routed from the field.

This old-time warrior was brought very forcibly to my mind by M’Candlish the day he took his departure from the forest, for instead of being filled with sorrow and dejection as I had expected to see him, he appeared to be in the very highest spirits. His indifference had given place to the keenest interest in every-

thing, and at breakfast-time he kept us in such roars of laughter that much of the meal was left untouched ; and in the end he contrived to leave us with the impression on our minds that he was merely going off for a little holiday, and would be back before we knew where we were.

On our way to the railway station our progress was arrested near the gate of the top paddock by a distant “cooe,” and looking round we beheld Dick the Dasher standing on a stump, with his old straw hat on the end of a stick, waving furious farewells.

Further along the parson kissed his hand gaily towards Stirling’s farm, saying as he did so, “God bless all the Stirlings, ’specially Jinny!” And presently the forest rang again as he lustily sang—

“When I come back again, Jinny.”

His face was literally beaming as he mounted the railway platform and greeted the philosophers who were assembled there as usual.

“What’s the debate about to-day?” he asked as he joined the circle.

“There ain’t any debate,” Stringy-bark Paterson took upon himself to explain.

"They're jest seein' who can tell the biggest lies."

"Now then, Stringy, none er that," Terrible Billy broke in. "A man that's bin lately converted oughtn't ter speak evil about 'ees neighbours."

"Lies, I call 'em, pure and simple," Stringy maintained tenaciously.

"Stringy 'as never bin blest with either poitry or Christian sentyment, Mr. M'Candlish," Terrible Billy explained, deprecatingly, turning to the parson. "We were only mentionin' instances of feenominal growth that's come under our personal observation in this wonderful country. Harry Peden was jist tellin' us about a bit ov ground over Warrnambool way that was so darned fertile that it wouldn't grow pertaters. It used ter drive 'em all inter tops, tops five foot high, but not a solitary spud underneath. Now," he went on, raising his eyebrows argumentatively and looking around, "is there anythink in a simple truth like that ter merit them uncalled-for remarks of Mister Paterson's?"

"Mister" Paterson had nothing to say to this outburst, but the elderly gentleman who has been described in these chapters as the Athenian in dungarees here broke in—

"Fer my part," he said, removing his hat and wiping his bald head with the spotted handkerchief, "I kin berleeve every word ov it, fer I've seen land meself that was too rich to grow parsnips—that is fer eatin'," he added.

"More lies," Stringy growled in a low tone, but not so low as to escape the quick ears of the conductor of oxen.

"Shut up, you evil-minded man," he shouted, and then nodding smilingly to the aged Athenian who stood by with the air of a Socrates on his trial—"Go on, grandfather." Thus encouraged, "grandfather" went on—

"It was a river flat in Gippsland," he said. "I wos down there lookin' fer land ter take up, an' I went to see a farmer on the Snowy River, an' arst 'im ter tell me wot the land wos like, an' 'e tole me it wos so good that 'e could grow parsnips eight foot long."

"Wot did I tell yer?" the advocate of truth interjected. The oxen conductor turned on him sharply.

"Look 'ere, Whiskers," he said, "if you carn't restrain yer unfeelin' remarks I'll 'av yer removed from the platform. Go on agen, grandfather," and "grandfather" continued his story.

"In them days," he said, "I wos a bit thick in the head, like some people in these days"

(this with a meaning look at Stringy), "and I didn't berleeve wot the man told me, so 'e took me down ter the river flat ter teach me sense.

" 'Ave a try ter pull up that one,' ses 'e, pointing out a parsnip in a patch ; so I stoops down and tugs till I nearly busted me boiler, but it was no go. Then 'e calls one of 'ees men, an' tells 'im to dig that parsnip out by the time we come back ; an' 'e took me on down the river ter show me a bit ov ground similar to 'ees own that was open for selection. W'en we got back the man was sittin' down exorsted near a big hole 'ed dug, and wipin' the preperation from 'ees brow.

" 'Got the parsnip out ? ' ses the farmer.

" 'No,' ses the man, 'I 'avn't.'

" 'Ow's that ? ' ses the farmer.

" 'Well,' ses the man, 'I went down after it eight foot, then the blame thing forked, an' I was sittin' 'ere waitin' fer you ter come, ter see w'ich prong ov it I'd better foller.' "

" Well," said Long Jack, when he had recovered himself somewhat from the effects of his laughter, "gimme an ole dog fer a hard road. I s'pose you took that bit ov ground up then, grandfather, made a fortshun out ov it, an' come down 'ere to spend it."

"No, I didn't," the elderly Athenian replied,

making diligent use of his handkerchief. "I ses to the farmer, 'I'm lookin' fer good land, mister, but this soots me too well,' so I cleared out and come 'ere; wish I 'adn't," he added regretfully.

"Well," said Terrible Billy, clearing his throat, and taking up another hole in the saddle strap that served him as a belt, "you might think, some ov you, that grandfather's been on the skite, but fer my part I don't doubt a word 'e sed, fer I've seen some land meself over Casterton way that's just as rich, or a bit richer than that Gippsland country." A roar of derisive laughter greeted this bold statement, but holding up his hand for silence, Billy went on unabashed—

"It wos so rich anyway," he said, "that it wouldn't grow——"

"Houses," Stringy Bark interjected.

"'Owses be blowed. Who ever 'erd of growin' 'owses! But it wos so rich that it wouldn't grow pumpkins."

"Oh! 'Ow wos that?"

"Well, on akount of the extreme wealth ov the soil the vines grew so fast that they wore the pumpkins out draggin' 'em along the ground."

When the laughter had subsided, Billy turned to M'Candlish, who, contrary to every rule of

nature, had sobered down under the influence of these veracious stories, and had now become his old inscrutable self.

"You look as though you were goin' somewhere, Mr. M'Candlish," he said, glancing at the hand-bag the parson was carrying. (Dick the Dasher was to bring his boxes in the cart later on, when he had sent us his address.)

"I am ; I'm going to town."

"Oh ! goin' ter make a long stay ?"

"I can't say exactly when I'll be back," M'Candlish replied evasively.

"Well, don't stay too long, fer we can't very well do without yer now. Isn't that right, boys ?"

"That's right, Billy," the others answered in a chorus.

M'Candlish was deeply touched. "You may be sure," he said fervently, "that I'll be back here as soon as ever I can get, and if all goes well I promise you we'll have a time when I do come."

"Well," said Billy, "I must look after my bullicks, or they'll be goin' 'ome without me, an' then the missis will think I'm out on the loose ; but give my love ter the Guv'ner-General an' the Lord Mayer ; tell 'em not ter be ankshus about me, that my 'ealth is nearly set up agen.

an' all bein' well I'll be down ter see 'em soon, an' resoom my natural position in Society."

"Right," the parson replied, with a smile that Billy understood perfectly. "I'll give them your message the very first time they call to see me."

"Well, so long, Mr. M'Candlish; take care ov yerself."

"So long, Billy; be good."

"Try to," Billy replied, and after a hearty handshake he went away to his team.

"Might as well shake hands all round," said M'Candlish presently, leaning out of the carriage window. "Goodbye, boys." One after another these rugged sons of the forest jostled their way forward and gripped the missionary's hand.

"Goodbye, Mr. M'Candlish, and don't forget to come back."

"No fear of that," he replied. "Goodbye, boys—be good—and God bless you!"

I came last, and walked with the train as it moved slowly out.

"I hadn't the heart to tell them I was off for good," M'Candlish said. "Never mind, they'll soon find out."

"Well, just tell them I got marching orders, but don't say why, and they may think it's promotion."

"We'll miss you very much, Mr. M'Candlish."

"It's nice to be missed sometimes," he replied.

"You'll be back for Jinny in the end of the summer?"

"I will, God helping me; and if you can manage to talk old Mr. Stirling over, we'll have such a jubilee at the wedding as the forest will never forget."

"Well, if I don't talk him over it won't be for want of trying. Goodbye, Mr. M'Candlish."

"Goodbye, old man—God bless you!" and with a wave of the hand, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

WHEN I was returning home after seeing the parson off by the train I was somewhat surprised to come upon old Mr. Stirling making his way along the track towards our house.

"Will Mr. M'Candlish be at home?" he asked when the usual greetings had been exchanged.

"No," I said, "he will not."

"Oh, A'm sorry. Where iss he? do you know?"

"He's in the train on his way to Melbourne."

"Iss he, inteed? I had no idea he thought of going. When will he be back?"

"He's not coming back."

"Not coming back?"

"No."

"Why, how iss that?"

"I think, Mr. Stirling," I said severely, "you should be able to answer that question without any help from me." The old man trembled and grew pale.

"And did he go for—for—that reason?" he asked in faltering tones; but without waiting for my reply he went on—

"I wass far too severe, but I thought he wass only playing wiss Chjinny, and I'm so hot-tempered that I couldn't listen to reasson. Afterwards, when I had cooled down, I saw I had made a creat fule of myself, and I wass chjust on my way up to tell him how sorry I am."

"I'm afraid you're too late."

"Then may God forgif me. But why did he leave so suddenly?"

"The Committee recalled him on the strength of your letter."

"They did?"

"Yes."

"Then the Committee is ass big a fule ass me. Puir laddie, I'll neffer forgif myself for this. The Buik says, 'Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no hairm,' and I haf done both. I wonder if there iss anything I could do to straighten matters out?"

My heart rose, and I took the opportunity with both hands. "I think there are two

things you might do," I answered quickly. "In the first place you could write the Committee saying you had made a mistake, and in the second place you could write M'Candlish expressing sorrow for what you have done, and letting him know that so far as he and Jinny are concerned you will put no obstacle in his way."

"Weel, ass to the fearst," he answered thoughtfully, "I'll do that to-nicht, and ass to the second, I'll talk it over wiss Chjinny's mother and see what she thinks apout it."

I had no fear if it were left to the judgment of wise old Mrs. Stirling, and was quite content.

"One thing I can't quite make out," the old man resumed, "and that is why Mr. M'Candlish left so quietly. I wonder he didn't ask for an inquiry. He didn't seem the sort of man to be afraid."

"You're very right there," I answered. "M'Candlish never feared the face of man nor devil, and had it not been that religion was a real thing with him, we'd have had the biggest row over that letter that the forest ever saw, and I would have pitied those who had to stand up against him. No, it wasn't fear that sent him away unheard; it was just the desire to save the Church and save you."

“Safe me?”

“Yes, save you. He knew, if it came to an inquiry, your charge would break down, and he knew, too, what kind of a time you would have amongst the forest people afterwards, and rather than see you suffer, he chose to shoulder the blame and say nothing about it.”

By the time I had finished the old man seemed thoroughly broken down, and it was in a very unsteady voice that he said—

“He hass put me to shame. I am old enough to be hiss father, but he wass more righteous than I. I misunderstood him completely, and I’m ferry, ferry sorry. You think it will be no use trying to get him back?”

“I’m afraid not. He’s appointed to the Mallee, and they’re sending us a man named Sinclair; he’s to be here next Sunday.”

“Weel, I must chjust do what I can to clear matters up, and I’ll write to him and tell him I’ll not stand in his way in regard to Chjinny; but one thing I feel sure of, Mr. Watson, and it’s thiss, that Robert M’Candlish will make hiss way to the front in spite of efferything, for a man of hiss pairts and—and—disposection couldn’t be burriet out of sight wiss all the airth in Mount Leura.”







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